# THE PRICE SHE PAID

AUTHOR OF

SAINT SIMON'S NIECE

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# THE PRICE SHE PAID.

*A NOVEL.*

BY

FRANK LEE BENEDICT,
AUTHOR OF "SAINT SIMON'S NIECE," "MADAME," ETC., ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. II.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE next morning Georgia and Maurice walked over to the post office, as they often did, by way of having an object in their stroll.

Georgia sat down on a bench under the shade of a walnut tree, and waited, while her brother entered the house to struggle with the very deaf and very obstinate old lady, who always appeared as unwilling to give people their correspondence as if called upon to part with some valuable personal possession. He returned victorious after a time, and said, as he handed his sister her portion of the booty,—

"I see you have a letter from Caruthers."

"Have I? Oh yes, this is his writing," Georgia replied carelessly, and put her epistles in her pocket. But her indifference was assumed; the well-known character on one special envelope had caught her eye before Maurice spoke, and the sight had not been pleasant to her, rousing reflections all the more annoying because so rude a contrast to the sunny mood she had been in for days. She remembered that her admirer's last letter still remained unanswered, though an unconscionable time had elapsed since its reception. She had deferred her reply for the express purpose of bestowing serious meditation upon him and his wishes, yet it seemed to her now that she had scarcely thought of either during the interval; had just drifted on in her old fashion, forgetting that she must soon go back to the realities of life—Mr Caruthers included.

"You don't seem in any hurry to find out what he has to say," Maurice observed playfully, though the under current of his thoughts was grave enough, having the previous night's conversation with Bourke as an object.

"We must go," said Georgia, rising; "you vowed you had only an hour to waste on me, and it is nearly up."

Maurice walked beside her in silence, determined to take advantage of this opportunity of giving his sister a hint that, if she was not careful, she might risk seriously hurting his friend. But it was difficult to decide how to speak; the slightest betrayal of Bourke's secret would be dishonourable, and any caution, unless very skilfully worded, would offend Georgia deeply.

"Has Caruthers ever proposed coming here?" he asked suddenly.

"Good gracious, no!" she answered, quite startled—she could not have told why—by the bare suggestion. Then she felt that her tone and exclamation were less complimentary to her suitor than they ought to have been, and might inspire Maurice with erroneous ideas in regard to her sentiments, so she added laughingly, "He might be goosey—no, he is too dignified—but they might all wonder, you know."

"I don't see what they could have to do with the matter. Anyhow, whom do you mean by 'they'—Miss French and Denis Bourke?" demanded Maurice, glancing down at her more searchingly than she liked.

"Don't be impertinent!" she cried gaily, yet conscious that her colour heightened. "Of course I meant Phil—she would persecute me day and night!"

Again Maurice relapsed into silence, meditating in what form he could best frame his counsel. Georgia had indulged a momentary vague sensation of uneasiness lest he should make further mention of Bourke; yet, when he did not, she feared that his dropping the subject looked suspicious. Then her conscience asked why it should, and was hastily informed that of course there could be no reason—she and her conscience knew very well that Miss Grosvenor was always absurd! All the same, she could not resist saying, even while she recognised the imprudence of the speech,—

"Naturally, though I might confide my perplexities to Phillis—for I love her dearly—I should scarcely feel it necessary to make a confidant of any young man I happen to be brought in contact with."

"Didn't Solomon say there was wisdom in having a multitude of counsellors?" Maurice asked gaily. "After all, is it quite fair for a girl charming enough to be dangerous, to go about letting the masculine portion of humanity believe her entirely unfettered, when there's a particular man hidden in the background? Of course I am only speaking on general principles, you understand."

"Of course—since it could not apply to me,"

returned Georgia. "I am entirely unfettered! I wrote you about the terms on which I stand towards Mr Caruthers; at least he fully comprehends! I hope and pray you are not going to fret me by taking up Aunt Conyngham's ridiculous theories."

She began speaking calmly enough, but before she finished her voice grew hurried and vexed.

"I don't mean to have theories," Maurice answered. "You must judge for yourself, my dear girl."

"You are a good boy!" cried Georgia. "Ah, there is Phillis coming to meet us," she added in a tone of unconscious relief.

Maurice left the two girls at the gate of the Nest, for he had promised to join Bourke at eleven, and go with him into the wood, where there were some trees to be marked for felling.

He wondered, as he walked on towards the place of rendezvous, if it could come within the range of possibility that Georgia during these past months had allowed any romantic vision to approach her, as might easily have been the case with an ordinary girl. It seemed incredible, according to his opinion of her character; attached as he was to his sister, he did not give her credit for great tenderness, or believe love the necessity with her which it is to most

women. But even if she had indulged in some faint gleams of a poetic idyl, he could feel confident that she would not allow it to interfere with her future ; it would never attain colouring and force sufficient to affect her judgment or ambition. Her head was so much stronger than her heart, that even supposing a case (difficult for him to do) where a struggle might arise between the two, the latter would undoubtedly be sacrificed.

In the whole round of his experience he had never met a woman so thoroughly worldly as his aunt, and Georgia had proved so apt a pupil that he considered her now very nearly the equal of her instructress. The idea of Georgia Grosvenor's relinquishing luxury, position, adulation for any man's sake, appeared positively absurd. He was sorry for poor old Denis, but then Denis must perceive too clearly the madness of his dream to let it sink deep enough to hurt very long. As for Georgia, if she had dreamed a little, she would wake now, and cast her vision aside with no more thought than she might bestow upon one that visited her in sleep. But he did her the justice to feel assured that she would take his warning, and put an end to any chance of Denis's endangering further his own peace of mind—indeed, Maurice did not

doubt that, before many days went by, Bourke would be enlightened in regard to Herbert Caruthers.

In the afternoon, Georgia found herself left to her own devices, for Phillis had driven with her grandmother to visit a friend who lived some miles off, and would not return till towards evening.

Georgia had read her letters, beginning with that from Mr Caruthers, ending with her aunt's, and taking a couple of missives from young lady friends between the two, but none of them had pleased her. Each in its way had been a little picture of the great world outside, and that world looked as flat and monotonous to Georgia as the Desert of Sahara, though she did not fail to ascribe this to the fault of her capricious, absurd temperament.

She grew too restless to read or write, so she set out for a ramble ; passing through the wood in the direction of the pond ; walking as rapidly as if she had some important engagement, and feared she might arrive too late. She was trying to outwalk her troublesome fancies—all the more troublesome because they were vague ; resolving themselves into a general feeling of dissatisfaction with existence, and a wonder as to what could be found that would make it worth possess-

ing. But her dreary thoughts kept pace with her, and at last she and they sat down together, on a mossy log by the water's edge, and for a long while she yielded herself a passive prey to their persecutions.

The morning had been bright, but the weather had changed as completely as Georgia's mood. The sky had grown grey and overcast; the breeze which surged up from the wood sounded as melancholy in her ear as if it had been the voice of some counsellor, animated by the spirit which inspired Job's friends; anxious to impress upon her the fact that all sublunary aims or wishes are "vanity and vexation of spirit."

Suddenly large drops of rain pattered down into the water and roused Georgia to a realisation of present emergencies. She looked up at the clouds and perceived that a shower was imminent—a heavy one too. The wood, in spite of its thickness, would not afford sufficient protection; if she ran with all her might she could reach the shelter of Denis Bourke's house in time to escape getting completely drenched.

Away she rushed up the steep path, turning the zig-zags at a rate which might have made her dizzy, had she not had the fear of the wetting before her eyes. The great drops had been but the avant couriers of the storm; the clouds

settled together in a black pall which enveloped the heavens; the air grew close and oppressive; the thunder rumbled in the distance, and now and then a vivid flash of lightning illumined the landscape, but no rain fell.

She reached the gate; hurried through the garden, and gained the porch at the rear of the house, just as the storm burst—beating down with the tropical fury which an American thunder shower can display.

Georgia stood for a few seconds contemplating the scene, then a gust of wind blew the rain across the verandah, and she retreated towards the angle to where the kitchen was situated, expecting to find Tabitha and old Patrick. The grey cat sat washing her face in Tabitha's arm-chair, but neither the autocrat of the region nor ancient Patrick were visible. Glancing about, Georgia espied a pan of fresh whortle-berries on the table, and as she was thirsty she ate a quantity of these, then tried to talk to the cat; he had finished his ablutions, and being sleepy, refused to converse—he did not even deign to show surprise at this intrusion of a stranger, but just turned his back on her, and addressed himself to slumber, curled up in a heap with his head resting between his fore legs.

"You are the most inhospitable monster I

ever met," said Georgia, but puss paid no attention to this reproof; so having eaten all the berries she wanted and duly admired the exquisite tidiness of Mistress Tabitha's domain, she concluded that she might as well explore the regions beyond. She crossed the passage into the dining-room, and as nothing of interest presented itself there, she went on into the main hall; but just as she had comfortably established herself in an easy-chair, she fancied that the place smelt of tobacco-smoke, and rose in high dudgeon.

Then it occurred to her she would like to look again at the portrait of Mr Bourke's mother and see if its loveliness struck her as much as it had done when she saw it before. How long ago that time seemed; how her opinion of Denis Bourke had changed, and, as usual, when she recalled her blindness and injustice towards him during the early weeks of their acquaintance she felt a little humiliated and ashamed.

She entered the drawing-room; the shutters of this apartment so sacred in Tabitha's eyes were carefully closed, but Georgia unceremoniously opened them, and also the glass-doors which gave on the back porch. Having come in expressly to study the picture, of course she proceeded to stare out at the sky, and wonder if it

never meant to clear ; to examine the books and newspapers on the tables ; in short, to do anything and everything except fulfil her original intention, behaving as human nature always does when compelled to wait.

At length, as she was pacing up and down, the portrait caught her eye. She stood for sometime regarding the beautiful face with a melancholy intentness which grew rather out of her own mood than from any special sadness in the painted lineaments. She recollected what Phillis had said about the resemblance to her—went to the mirror which hung over the mantel and contemplated her own image for a few moments with an evident dissatisfaction whereat any spectator would certainly have marvelled. Then she glanced towards the picture again, nodded her head, and observed half aloud,—

"Oh, you have the best of it. There is no doubt of that, and yet I am as handsome as you. I know what makes the difference. You were tender and true, down to the very core of your heart, and I—I'm only Georgia Grosvenor—and Georgia is what the men call in their horrid slang—a fraud ! Yes, you are," she continued, glancing again at her own reflection. "You are worldly and selfish, away down to the bottom ! You have a perception of beauty and truth, but

you are too contemptible even to try to live up to it." She remained silent for a moment, then exclaimed, as if answering some second person, who had heaped these reproaches on her head,—"After all, there's a great deal in me that is nice, if only it could get to the surface." She burst out laughing, and before her merriment ended, felt that she should like to cry, and ejaculated,—"I never knew so ridiculous a creature in the whole course of my life! But it isn't Georgia—it's the storm —thunder always affects me in the oddest fashion!"

She returned to the porch to consult the weather, but a fresh gust of wind drove in a torrent of rain which forced her to retreat. The vivid flashes of lightning blinded her, and the roll of the thunder sounded like a tremendous cannonading. She grew positively nervous, and determined to seek the kitchen again. The cat's companionship would be better than none, even if he refused to notice her, and his supreme indifference to the conflict of the elements might shame her nerves into composure.

But she stepped back as she reached the door: it was silly enough to feel as she did; any further yielding to her folly would be unpardon-

able. She sat down by a table, and drew the nearest book towards her; she would oblige herself to read, and endeavour to forget her absurd sensations, since she could not overcome them by force of will.

The volume proved to be a large edition of Shelley; she turned the pages until she found Alastor, and began reading the stately measures half aloud. She very soon discovered that she might as well have been perusing Sanscrit; her mind refused to attach any meaning to the lines, or even to make an attempt at doing so. It seemed a positive desecration to approach the great poet in such a vacuous mood; she closed the book, and rose from her seat; but she had left the volume lying too far over the edge of the table, and some unguarded movement of her arm sent it down upon the floor. As she stooped to pick it up, she saw a sheet of paper which had fallen out from between the leaves. It was the sketch Bourke had made of her on the previous night, and had forgotten to destroy. Tabitha, during her dusting operations of the morning, had noticed it under the copy of Shelley, and placed it inside the tome for safe keeping.

Georgia recognised Bourke's touch, and told herself, rather fretfully, that she wished the

gentleman would find some other way of amusing his leisure moments; nothing more annoying than to come upon a portrait of one's-self in a place where it had no business to be; taken too without leave or licence.

Still she stood regarding the sketch; the resemblance was perfect; she could see that. Then came a hasty thought. How closely he must have studied the face to succeed in producing such a likeness. The reflection disturbed her, though she did not seek to discover the reason why it should.

She noticed some lines traced at the bottom of the page; they had been very faintly written, and afterwards partially obliterated, but she could decipher them; she did not want to try—still she found herself doing so.

> *"It were all one*
> *That I should love a bright, particular star*
> *And to think to wed it."*

She dropped the paper on the table as suddenly as if it had burned her fingers; then hid it in the book again, and went back to the porch.

The rain was still falling, but less heavily; the lightning had ceased; at intervals the echo of thunder boomed faintly from the distance, giving

tokens of the direction in which the storm had rushed away.

Hardly ever in her life had Georgia felt more troubled and conscience-stricken than at this moment. What had she been about during all these weeks? She had begun with the vaguely-formed intention of proving to Phillis that it would be a waste of her youth, her beauty, her mental gifts, to allow herself to care for her neighbour. This opinion Georgia had been forced to relinquish; then she had wanted to rouse Bourke out of what she termed the inexplicable apathy which could enable him to rest content with his present existence.

But all these ideas and wishes appeared now to belong to a period so remote! What had she been about during these succeeding weeks which had fled so swiftly, and yet seemed so long recall, positively not weeks, but years! Wh floating passively along, actually not thinking except when Mr Caruthers obtruded himself through his letters, and forced her to remember this present episode, had no more part in her real life than some idyllic romance of a poet's brain!

And now, as Mr Caruthers gained a place in her reverie, she felt for the instant that she would be glad never to set eyes on him again.

But it did not matter about her and her absurd feelings; indeed, they did not go deep enough even to deserve that appellation, her fancies and caprices. The question of importance was —had she done harm? Could it be possible that Denis Bourke entertained a warmer regard for her than was consonant with his peace of mind. Oh, worse than that, with Phillis's happiness!

But, as usual, she was exaggerating beyond all bounds of common sense. The sketch proved nothing; the quotation might have been the result of a half sentimental mood, such as everybody will indulge now and then—possessing no foundation whatever. Yet even while thinking this; or, to speak correctly, trying to make herself think it, there came up the recollection of her conversation with Maurice. Had he meant to warn her against troubling his friend's quiet? The words he had spoken would assume that significance now in spite of her, turning her fears into a positive certainty which made her grow cold from head to foot.

The rain had ceased; the sun was peeping out; she must go home; she should like to run ten miles without stopping. There was an odd hurry and confusion in her mind, as if something lay hidden there which she feared to contem-

plate ; but this was just another bit of her folly, nothing more. She must go back to the Nest ; the path through the wood would be wet, but if she went by the highway she might meet Bourke and Maurice at the turn where the road led down from the mountain, and she did not wish to see anybody. Indeed, no one must learn that she had visited the dwelling. How lucky Tabitha and Patrick were both absent. She closed the shutters, crossed the passages, and left the house by the kitchen door.

She ran all the way home, and when she got there was so drenched that she had to go up to her room and change her clothes. When she had done this a spasm of orderliness seized her, and she worked as hard as if she had been paid for it in arranging her bureau-drawers. She could have hit upon no task more uncalled for, but she persuaded herself of its necessity, found a new place for each separate article, and so upset her belongings that, for several days after, she could find nothing she wanted.

By the time she had finished and tired herself half to death, she heard Phillis French's voice summoning her from the foot of the stairs.

"Don't you ever mean to descend, Georgia ? Grandma and I are perishing for our tea ! If you have turned into a statue, or lost the use of

your limbs, signify your state and I'll come up and restore you to life! I've a wonderful new remedy for Doctor's cough. I shall try it on you to make sure it won't hurt him—every human being must be put to use in this world!"

## CHAPTER II.

THE next few days were such thoroughly uncomfortable ones to Georgia, that there were moments when she felt inclined to write to Aunt Conyngham, and beg her to insist upon her departure. She did not afford her relative the triumph of thinking her weary of the quiet which she had so often in her letters declared the pleasantest experience of her life, but she did go so far as to suggest to Maurice the possibility of their making a journey in some direction. Maurice at first turned a deaf ear to her proposal, and when she mentioned it a second time, expressed disapprobation, and informed her that she was without exception the most restless human being he had ever encountered.

"It is not very long since you told me you could not bear even to think of the time when

you must go away," he said, "and now you want to fly off, heaven knows where or for what."

"I had half promised the Fortescues a visit this autumn," Georgia answered, with unusual meekness.

"Ouf! a horrid house—sure to be full of the most tiresome people one knows—taking their town amusements with them into the country," cried Maurice. "You'll not delude me into going, I assure you; this pastoral existence is too pleasant to forsake."

"It is quite wonderful to hear you chant its praises—you will end by buying a crook, and turning shepherd, if this state of mind continues!" said Georgia, plucking up spirit enough to wax slightly ironical.

"The poetry you wrote about it affected me in advance," he replied gaily. "Don't be in a hurry to go back to pomps and vanities; this is a capital place for meditation, if I can judge of your new mood, every day you spend here now will eventually tell powerfully in favour of reason and Herbert Caruthers."

Georgia endeavoured to look contemptuous, but she felt that the attempt was a failure, and Maurice proved by his burst of laughter that he held the same opinion.

"These are subjects upon which it is rather bad taste to jest," said she stiffly.

"Many people think so, I am aware, but that is not my view," returned he. "However, my remark was not intended as a jest."

"I believe you would want me to marry the man if he were positively abhorrent to me — just for the sake of his money — you are as bad as Aunt Conyngham herself," Georgia exclaimed.

"I beg your pardon; it is you, not I, who have been that elegant lady's pupil. It would never occur to me to want you to marry any man from that motive."

"And you know I am not capable of doing it!"

"I never accused you of being, my dear child. You have told me over and over that it was necessary you should feel esteem and respect for the man you decided to accept; that he must possess wealth and position—there your demands ended."

"Nothing more is requisite," said Georgia emphatically.

"Very well; Herbert Caruthers certainly fulfils these needs."

"And of course I mean to marry him!" cried Georgia, goaded by Maurice's vexatious coolness

and her own conflicting sentiments into an assertion she had no intention of making.

"Then, of course, it only remains for me to congratulate—"

"Oh, bother!" she broke in. "I mean I don't know whether I mean to or not!"

"Your explanation lacks lucidity, and your English is faulty," said he.

"Oh, if you want to show me that I love you when I wish to discuss my affairs, I have done."

"You don't wish to discuss them," he answered, "you only wish to quarrel with me. Why, goodness knows, I don't."

"Nor I either," Georgia admitted penitently. "The truth is, I have been as cross as two sticks (excuse the inelegance) for several days, but I can't imagine what ails me."

"Perhaps you are not well."

"I am tired of making that excuse for my vagaries, besides, I have grown as strong as possible since I fell under Phil's care."

"Then don't be ungrateful and want to rush off."

Georgia knew she was getting on unsafe ground, still she could not induce herself to forsake it.

"Did you ever think we might end by doing

mischief here?" demanded she, and felt ready to bite her tongue off as soon as she had uttered the words.

"In what manner, please?"

"I mean you might," cried she, with feminine ingenuity, seeing a way out of her dilemma by making him the person alone in question, and at the same time inflict a little punishment in revenge for his teasing.

"And how might I accomplish that feat, my dear Minerva?"

"Oh, suppose—suppose—you know you always flirt with every pretty girl you come near—and if, for instance, Mr Bourke ended by not liking your paying so much attention to Phillis."

"What would he have to do with the matter?"

"I don't know; if he cared for her he might think he had something."

"But his feelings would not be my concern."

"But if she liked him in reality and only wanted to amuse herself, and if they quarrelled—"

Georgia broke down in despair; she had not punished Maurice, and had only succeeded in putting herself in a still more awkward position.

"So your friend and mine have a weakness for each other?" he asked, calm as ever.

"How can I tell. It is natural to suppose so

—thrown together as they have been in this dull place."

"I think," said Maurice, "that we can safely leave them to manage their own affairs. Miss French certainly is quite competent."

And now Georgia feared that he was vexed, and might flirt with Phillis—the hope of annoying another man would prove a powerful motive.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of Phil's being dazzled by your fascinations," said she.

"Then, after all, your fears resolve themselves into a care for Denis Bourke," said he. "You might as well have grown anxious before I came."

"I don't know what you mean!" cried Georgia indignantly.

"Oh yes, I think you do," he answered. "Ah, here comes Mrs Davis; it is lucky, for we were both very stupid, and you were rapidly waxing belligerent."

"No, no, I really was not," pleaded Georgia.

He had risen and was walking forward to meet the old lady—he only looked back and shook his head laughingly in reply to his sister's asseveration.

He gave Mrs Davis his arm, and led her down the porch to her favourite seat.

"I think you appeared just in time, dear madam," said he, in the soft caressing tone his voice always assumed when he addressed a helpless old woman or a pretty young one. "Georgia was trying to upset my amiability."

"I don't believe that is easily done," she replied, with her pleasant smile. "But I am quite sure that Georgia is not given to teasing."

"That's right, grandma," said Georgia; "don't let him slander me; he thinks he has a right because he is my brother."

"I'll tell you what she is given to, Mrs Davis," said Maurice, "and I know you will admit it is a very bad habit."

"Well?" asked grandma.

"She is always imagining improbable possibilities to make herself unhappy over."

"Ah, never do that, Georgia," said grandma. "When you are walking through a wood there are always briars enough to scratch you without going in search of any."

"Good!" pronounced Maurice. "G. G. ought to copy that advice, and keep it to look at every night and morning."

After a little Georgia sauntered away into the garden and walked up and down, wishing that she could believe her fears were imaginary. She remained pondering her perplexities longer than

she was aware ; the twilight had gathered without her noticing, and suddenly she heard Denis Bourke say,—

" Miss Grosvenor, grandma Davis has sent me to tell you that you must come in, for the dew is falling."

She turned back and met him coming along the path.

" Grandma believes that the dew falls at all hours," said she, trying to smile.

" You look tired," he said.

" It must be the weather," she replied ; " I am sure there is a storm in the air."

An impulse seized her to tell him then and there about Herbert Caruthers, but it seemed absurd to do it in such an uncalled-for and unprovoked fashion, yet it never would be any less uncalled for until the approach of some crisis which would bring the knowledge come to late, if she were right in believing that his fancy had wandered towards her during these quiet weeks.

She began talking very fast upon the first trivial subject which presented itself, and knew by his face that he was wondering what rendered her so unlike her ordinary self, but he asked no question.

When they reached the porch they found grandma laughing at a gay skirmish between

Phillis and Maurice. Georgia sat down near the old lady, but was rather silent, and for a while Denis Bourke appeared inclined to follow her example. Grandma's prejudice against the dew finally sent them all indoors, and some remark of hers about an article in one of the day's papers started Denis upon serious subjects, and the expression of certain peculiar opinions which roused even more opposition than usual in Miss Grosvenor's mind.

She perceived that she was combating his arguments with uncalled-for energy, but could not check herself. Phillis and Maurice laughed at them both for a time, but when half-past nine o'clock struck, and grandma retired to her room, they were allowed to grow as earnest as they pleased, for after Phillis returned from helping the old lady into bed—a duty never omitted—she joined Peyton, who had gone out into the porch during her absence, leaving Georgia and Bourke to the undisturbed possession of the parlour.

They had fallen upon the discussion, now grown an old subject of contention between them, of individual effort and its results, which, in Georgia's creed, required and merited personal fame and reward, considerations that Bourke rejected.

"What difference does it make," he said, "whether a man named Shakespeare or one called Bacon wrote the plays—the important thing to humanity is that the plays exist."

"But we want to know who did the work—hero-worship is natural to mankind," said Georgia.

"Exactly. We waste so much time admiring the man that we don't have half enough to study and profit by the deeds themselves. After all, what is that poking about among the private affairs of dead and gone celebrities, but another form of the love of gossip? The schoolman need not be so severe on Mrs Grundy for her interest in her neighbour's business. He is animated by a spirit very similar to hers, only he is too selfish to care about the joys or sorrows of those living around him. People must be dust and ashes before he can admire or sympathise."

"Really I must congratulate you on having found a very original theory," returned Georgia. "So you would deprive us of the benefit to be gained by reading the lives of the eminent dead, and elevating our petty existences by the contemplation of the epics they lived."

"No; I did not mean that, though I think we should do ourselves and others more good if we spent part of the time trying to help our neighbours to make poems out of their lives."

"Lives as petty as our own!" cried Georgia with disdain.

"Those of dead men may seem epic in the reading," said Bourke; "because all the petty details are left out. There would be a woeful betitling of the epos if we had chronicled the hero's grumbling over a cold dinner. His irritation at a missing button; his dislike to being asked for money; his quarrelling with his wife over the colour of a woman's hair; all the small miseries which find a place in daily life, just as a tragedy has its under-current of farce, only a farce cruelly painful to the actors, however amusing it may seem to the spectator, either in written or living tragedy."

"One thing is certain," said Georgia, going back to the first difficulty; "take away the incentive of personal ambition and its reward, and you deprive men of the strongest of all motives for trying to lift themselves above their kind."

"They have no right to want to—their duty is to help lift up their fellows; any other life, no matter how fine it shows, is just as narrow as that of the laziest luxury-lover! That is the very reason famous men sooner or later reach a point where everything becomes vanity and vexation of spirit. The aims have been selfish, and at last vigour goes out of them like air out

of a pricked soap-bubble—not always suddenly—the prick may be so small that the air escapes slowly—but the consciousness of the emptiness always comes suddenly."

"I don't believe that is man's fault; it is the inevitable law of nature," said Georgia.

"That can't be, since we recognise the perfection of nature. She is often cold and hard according to our human ideas, but she must be perfect else she could not exist."

"I wonder how men keep alive then. The race ought to become extinct according to your view."

"No; because there are the elements of perfection in every created creature. It can't be otherwise, since God made them, and they must therefore be a part of God himself. Men hinder their own development, and thereby the development of the whole race; just by that putting of the personal element into their aspirations, which we call ambition, and admire so hugely."

"It is a necessity."

"It is because they are not developed up to the standard which they are capable of reaching. It is, in fact, a disease which, when human life attains a higher scale, men will be as much ashamed of admitting, as we should in our century to have the plague of the Middle Ages, as men

sometimes will be ashamed of having diphtheria or typhoid fever, which we are only just growing enlightened enough to consider a misfortune, instead of perceiving it is a disgrace."

"I must decline to allow that the comparison has any significance," cried Georgia hotly.

"The doctors tell us of a physical disease called fatty degeneration of the heart," said Denis composedly; "there is a moral malady—fatty degeneration of the soul; sooner or later it attacks every man, however noble his career, who puts self forward in his aims; who values fame because a personal possession."

"Oh, he must even possess a grand scorn for that! Why, in order to show his contempt for his fellows who bestow it!"

"No; it is valuable if the result of deeds which have helped men on towards the light; but valuable only in the way that wealth is; because its possession increases its possessor's power of doing good."

"I think you would end by convincing me that, even in trying to do good, one must guard against allowing the desire to grow into a monomania," said Georgia, with irrepressible irritation.

"If Christ had owned two coats he would have given away one," said Denis; "the man who followed his example would be called mad;

yet if that principle were carried through all human actions, the kingdom that he preached would be established."

"If the good things of this world were to be equally divided to-morrow, in a very few years there would be as many poor as there are now," returned she.

"Not a doubt of that," said Denis; "but the use and benefit thereof could be equally divided."

"Nothing does so much harm as indiscriminate charity."

"Nothing; in fact, there ought to be no such thing as charity; there ought to be work and pay for every man, and every man forced to earn it. It is the duty of the State to take care of the beggars and the improvident; but how? By providing them work, and obliging them to do it, and employing the proceeds for daily needs, and a provision for old age, for educating their children, if they have any."

"Very fine theories; very dangerous when seized upon by bad or ignorant men."

"Begin by making education so general there would be no ignorant; restrain bad men, but bring your law to bear upon all—the ambitious leader as well as the thief!"

"Still we need not preach communism," said Georgia.

These words led them back to the subject of their own differences. Why Bourke's opinions should cause her such unusual irritation, Georgia could not understand; but the longer the conversation continued—and they pursued it for another full hour—the more irritated she grew, and though disturbing recollections of the discovery she had made at his house intruded now and then, and ought, she knew, to have rendered her gentle and forbearing, somehow they only increased her annoyance, and forced her on to speeches, which, in the personal application, he could scarcely refrain from accepting, were positively harsh and unkind.

At length she brought the talk to an abrupt close, by saying in her childish, fine-lady tone,—

"I believe I am tired. Your eloquence is rather overwhelming, Mr Bourke, even if I cannot call it convincing."

She saw him colour, and regretted her words at once, but would not admit it—really he deserved to be punished. She called to Phillis to come and sing, but Phillis only answered by ordering Bourke to play his violin, which he had brought to the house at her and Georgia's request. Georgia, however, did not speak, though he looked at her as if to ask that she would. Phillis repeated her command with pretty imperiousness,

and he obeyed—playing for half-an-hour in an exquisite fashion, which stirred Miss Grosvenor's very soul.

As soon as he had finished he said good-night somewhat abruptly, and went away, leaving Maurice to follow at his leisure.

## CHAPTER III.

FOR a couple of days it seemed to Georgia that her rebuff had put a certain distance between her and Bourke. He had got back a shade of his old shyness ; was cautious in his conversation, and, if he reached the verge of what Phillis playfully styled "an exposition," retreated with an apologetic glance at Miss Grosvenor, which at once nettled and disturbed her.

But something troubled her still more—this was Phillis's odd manner. One hour she would be in her wildest spirits ; the next preoccupied and absent, and it appeared to Georgia these changes were most perceptible after a visit from Bourke. Oh, what had she done ?—what had she done ? Georgia made herself very miserable, and could not decide how to act ; if this style of affairs continued, she must find an excuse and go away.

She would be the vilest wretch alive if she had caused her friend real unhappiness. But she had not; Bourke must have loved Phillis for years; if his fancy had wandered a little, it would not affect his heart; he would find that had never wavered in its allegiance. But how if Phillis refused to pardon him? She was a proud girl—an obstinate one too—and might punish him and herself for this lapse.

Yet, after all, the idea that Bourke had been temporarily lured away from Phillis might be a delusion of her own vanity. How contemptible she should have thought Maurice if he had indulged in a belief that he had fascinated Phillis! A week ago she had feared he might really have done so, and now she was dreading that Phillis had received a wound through her affection for Denis Bourke. Indeed, Georgia Grosvenor's inconsistencies were too ridiculous; why could she never go calmly on like other people—amuse herself and not worry! Neither Phillis nor Bourke were hurt—there was no ground for any of her absurd fancies—even the sketch and the lines written under signified nothing whatever.

Then, just as she reached this conclusion, and was trying to derive comfort therefrom, she encountered the pair in the garden. They had

evidently been talking seriously ; Bourke looked embarrassed and ill at ease, and she could almost have declared there were tears in Phillis's eyes. But the girl turned away her head for a moment, then began to talk gaily, though Denis, man-like, was less successful in his efforts to appear unconcerned.

That night Phillis came into Georgia's room with a determined face.

"It is a long while since I have asked what you thought of my neighbour?" she said abruptly, sitting down opposite, so that the moonlight gave her a clear view of her friend's countenance.

She meant to have an explanation. The suddenness, the lack of circumlocution, fairly took Miss Grosvenor's breath away ; she knew that if she looked as guilty as she felt, Phillis would have reason to condemn her without mercy. She could not steady her mind by reflecting that a woman capable of open speech upon such a matter must be so lacking in delicacy that her sorrows would deserve slight commiseration ; could only remember that she was sorely to blame, and long helplessly for some argument to convince her judge that she had done no irremediable harm.

Before she could speak, Phillis asked,—

"Did I ever tell you how he lost his money?"

From one of these contradictory but very common impulses of human nature, Georgia found a certain bitter satisfaction in giving a fling at the man, grieved and remorseful as she was.

"On the turf—as most English and Irish gentlemen do," she said.

"He gave it to pay the debts of a relation who had been coward enough to kill himself, and leave his wife and children to be dishonoured," cried Phillis, with flashing eyes.

"Maurice never told me," was all Georgia could articulate, feeling a sudden glow at her heart, as if it had been kindled by that passionate glance.

"What do you think of that for Don Quixotism?" demanded Phillis.

"I think it was very noble," Georgia replied, in a rather choked voice.

"Most people would call it mad," said Phillis; "but then you are sometimes a little mad yourself, you know."

"Sometimes," Georgia echoed dismally, all her fears rushing back at the defiant tone.

"In your way, I mean," continued Phillis; "but that can't be Denis Bourke's way, because you and he never agree."

"Oh, I am aware that I am far from being a

noble person—you needn't explain!" said Georgia, vaguely wishing she could discover a pretext for indulging in a sensation of injury.

"It seems to me time for an explanation," retorted Phillis, still in that tone of defiance.

"If—if explanations can do any good," faltered Georgia, for the first occasion in her life, positively afraid of any human being's eyes.

"That remains to be seen," returned Phillis magisterially.

"Oh, Phil, are you angry with me?" exclaimed Georgia, longing to fall at her friend's feet and sob out all her sorrow and remorse.

"I don't know yet," said Phillis; "that will be seen too as we get further on."

"Further on," Georgia mechanically repeated, with a shiver.

"Don't turn yourself into an echo, Miss Grosvenor. You have as independent an individuality as any person I ever met, and you can't get rid of it," pursued Phillis, with her magisterial air.

"Sometimes I feel as if I had none whatever," sighed the culprit, as if putting in a plea for mercy.

"Georgia," said Phillis, still smiting her with the fire in her eyes, "it is possible for a person to have too many feelings and too little feeling."

"I suppose so," Georgia answered with another sigh.

"I wish you wouldn't gasp," cried her persecutor with sudden fretfulness. "You quite put me out."

"Oh, Phil, are you in earnest or fun?" asked Georgia, with a faint hope rising in her mind.

"Dead earnest," said Phillis. "I am very unhappy to-night, Georgia. It is not my way to howl and weep, but I mean it just as much as if I let down my back hair, talked blank verse and shed bucketfuls of tears."

"I'm—I'm so sorry," Georgia fairly moaned.

"So am I—so there is one subject on which we agree," Miss French made answer.

"I hope there are a good many," Georgia ventured to say very feebly.

"Let us see if we agree about my neighbour," retorted Phillis.

"Oh, you mean Mr Bourke," stammered her victim.

"Georgia, this is a bad moment to choose for pretence or affectation," cried Phillis French, in a voice of mingled warning and contempt.

"I—I think very, very highly of him!" exclaimed Georgia, struggling to regain her wits and speaking in breathless haste. "He is what you said—noble! Too visionary—too much of

a Don Quixote ; but one can't help admiring and honouring him for being so."

" So far, so good—but we have not got very far," observed Phillis French authoritatively.

" What more can I say ? I don't approve of his theories ; that is, I think them impracticable —but I admire him for holding them, though I believe trying to carry them out will be a sacrifice of his talents," returned Georgia, in the same breathless fashion.

" You do think him clever then ?"

" Yes—extremely ! Not a quick, showy person, but once he grasps a subject, no man has a wider or juster view." She stopped ; Phillis kept silence. The possibility of perhaps setting matters right without an explanation nerved Georgia to continue. " I did think at first, Phil, it would be a pity if—if you liked him—a waste of your beauty and gifts—but he is well worth liking. Who knows, perhaps after all more happiness is to be found in this quiet sort of life than any other."

Phillis turned away her head, and kept it averted as she answered slowly,—

" Denis Bourke does not wish to pass his life with me."

The words, and the manner in which they were uttered, sent Georgia down into the depths again.

"Oh!—you—you have not quarrelled?" she exclaimed.

"Quarrelled?" repeated Phillis, in a tone so suspiciously hysterical that it seemed evident her will could not much longer control her overtaxed nerves. "What would be the use for an unprotected girl like me to quarrel with a man because—for that reason?"

"But he does wish it—he must!" cried Georgia desperately, yet grieved as she was by Phillis's suffering, she could not help feeling disappointed in her—she would not have believed the girl capable of uttering such love-sick complaints to any living creature. "I am so sorry," she added again, conscious that now her exclamation meant as much regret at finding her admired friend so weak as it did sympathy.

Phillis wheeled quickly round, and her voice got back its old sullen ring as she answered,—

People usually are sorry after they have done all the mischief they can."

"Oh, Phil, Phil! am I to blame?" groaned Georgia, once more wholly given up to her remorse. "I would rather have died than cause you trouble—I never was half so fond of any woman as I am of you. I never dreamed of hurting you—oh! you told me—you said—no, I did not mean that."

"I told you that even if he belonged to me, and you could take him away, I should not think him worth grieving for—I remember," Phillis rejoined. "I gave you my permission—if that was needed—to flirt with him."

"I have not flirted," cried Georgia somewhat indignantly.

"What have you been doing?" Phillis asked, with ominous composure.

"I didn't think at all," replied Georgia, relapsing into mournfulness. "It has been so pleasant here. I found him so different from what I expected—I believe I wanted to atone for having underrated him; oh, certainly I never dreamed of hurting you—never!"

"Why do you talk about having hurt me?" asked Phillis. "I've no wounds to heal."

"But you said you—"

"I said Denis Bourke didn't wish to pass his life with me."

"He does—I am sure he does! Oh, Phil, don't let temper, false pride, come between you! He is thoroughly good and noble—a man of whose love any woman might be proud—yes, for whom she might be glad to make sacrifices. His aims are so lofty that, beside them, ordinary ambition looks petty and mean. It is like breathing a purer air than that of this dusty old

world, merely to listen to his conversation. Why, sometimes when he grows excited, his face is fairly transfigured—he looks positively handsome."

She stopped short; this rhapsody was not what she had intended to utter. A sudden confusion caused her to shrink into herself. She glanced timidly at Phillis, that incomprehensible young lady started out of her chair and clapped her hands, while the room rang with her laughter.

"Bravo, G. G.!" she cried. "You have given your opinion with a vengeance — it is all true too."

"Oh, then you are not angry with me—you are sure?"

"Don't be a jibbering, Georgia," returned Phillis French. "My dear, I saw how wretched you were making yourself, and decided you had been remorseful long enough."

"But you do care for him?" persisted Georgia, in bewilderment.

"As much as if he were my brother; indeed, I do, but in the way you mean, no more than for yours, and, if you'll excuse me, that quantum couldn't well be less."

"I'll never again believe you in earnest about anything," cried Georgia; "in mercy's name, why did you make such a scene? You do care for him."

"No, my child; but I wanted you to discover that you like him a little, and I think I have succeeded."

She ran off before Georgia could answer, and locked herself in her own room. Miss Grosvenor indulged in a tolerably energetic fit of wrath at having been deceived by her friend's comedy, then forgot her vexation in relief that Phillis was heart-whole, and straightway began in a bewildered fashion to marvel if there was any truth in the girl's last words.

Had she, Georgia Grosvenor, allowed her fancy to wander, her imagination to overpower her head? Why, now it seemed as if Phillis's speech had been a light to render clear a truth she had known before, but refused to recognise. Yet this was absurd; her opinions had been all very well when she meant them to apply to Phillis's case but in her own, they would be as mad as Bourke's schemes. She could dismiss her late trouble from her mind; she had not hurt her friend. As for Denis, he was so enamoured of his utopian dreams, that he had no place in his heart for ordinary loves.

And she—she admired his talents; but like him in any romantic fashion—certainly not; she had nothing to do with romance. She must really be in earnest about going home. Too pro-

longed a sojourn in this dreamy haunt would prove enervating—unfit her for the actual world —and that was her place. She must go back to reality—yes, and to Mr Caruthers. At bottom she had always intended to marry him—of course she had. She had coquetted—not with him—with herself, and it was time to cease such folly, so unkind to the man, so unworthy her womanly dignity.

She would write to him at once, accept his hand, tell Maurice she had done it, and there put an end to further vagaries and hesitations. But before she had completed the second page of her letter, she pushed the sheet impatiently aside. She was too tired to be able to collect her ideas ; Phillis's ridiculous performance, following on her recent disquietude, had unnerved her. She would go to bed, and put by thought of any description until thoroughly rested.

Two long hours after she found herself still awake, and crying softly in the dark ; but where her fancies had wandered she could not have told, only that she had been vaguely dreaming of an existence into which love—real love—entered and common life looked dull and cold in comparison.

The next morning Phillis French wisely kept out of Georgia's way, except when grandma's

presence could serve as a protection, but her exaggerated courtesy and pretence of extreme deference, while her eyes sparkled with mischief, kept Georgia in a nervous state, divided between vexation and a desire to laugh.

At last she caught the provoking girl in the spring-house; not even Cinders was there to ward off the storm. At sight of her Phillis French sank into a chair, picked up a pair of garden-shears from the table, and held them out, saying,—

"They're a little dull, but you can cut my head off, if you have patience to hack long enough."

"I've three minds never to speak to you again," cried Georgia, laughing and pulling Phillis's pretty pink ear till she shrieked. "How dare you make me so miserable by pretending to be angry and hurt!"

"Really, my dear, if you could believe me, of the order of young maidens who air their heart-griefs, you deserved it all," retorted Phillis French. "But I'll never behave so again, if you will only forgive me this time."

"Then we will drop the subject," said Georgia. "Of—of course, that last absurd speech of yours was only fun like the rest."

"Of course," Phillis promptly assented. "You are above weaknesses."

"I've something I think I will tell you," continued Georgia, playing softly with her friend's hair.

"Do," said Phillis, putting on her demurest expression.

"There is a man who has asked me to marry him," pursued Georgia slowly, but without hesitation. "I said no; but he wanted me to reflect, and give him an answer later."

"And have you reflected?" Phillis asked.

"There is only one sensible thing to do—that would be plain enough to anybody who knows me," returned Georgia. "But, Phil, you don't seem surprised! Maurice—"

"Has not given me even a hint! I can't tell you how I know, but I felt sure there was such a person! I know who he is too—that Mr Caruthers you spoke of the other day." As Georgia nodded assent, she added,—"I suppose your mind is made up, since you have devoted so many months to the process?"

"Certainly, it ought to be."

"But is it? that's the question," demanded Phillis French.

"The truth is, Phil, I am the most absurd creature in the world! I tell myself I am going to think seriously, then I find I have got miles away from the matter in hand, and am dreaming

like a school-girl. I believed this quiet spot would be just the place for meditation, and it has proved exactly the reverse. Why, often for days and days I have drifted on, and only woke up when I received a fresh letter to recollect I had not thought at all."

She laughed in a shamefaced fashion, but Phillis French did not encourage her by so much as an answering smile.

"Then your mind is not made up?" she said, with great energy.

"Oh, at bottom it must be—has been from the first, I should say. I can't be an utter idiot, you know!"

"Granting that you are not?"

"Why, then, I must mean to marry him. A man whom I thoroughly respect; rich, distinguished—good gracious! what could I ask more?"

"What!" echoed Phillis French, but her voice was so carefully modulated, that Georgia could not decide whether it expressed inquiry or simple affirmation.

"You see, Phil, you'll not think me a silly for talking about my private affairs? It is not so bad as if I were gushing over some poetical love-secret."

"There is no love in the case, then?"

"He likes me—admires me—thinks me oceans

cleverer than I am—but assuredly he would not break his heart if I never consented to marry him."

"That is lucky," said Phillis. "So you would not care about being loved?"

"I think it would be beautiful!"

"But troublesome, if one did not love the man, especially if he were one's husband!"

"Oh, Phil!" exclaimed Georgia, in a tone of discouragement, shivering a little too, as she often caught herself doing when she carried her thoughts far enough to contemplate Mr Caruthers, even momentarily, in a marital light. "You understand I am not bound in the least," she continued rapidly. "I have given no encouragement, neither he nor my own conscience could blame me if I decided—"

"In his favour," interrupted Phillis French.

"Ah, now you are cruel!" said Georgia, at last able to take refuge in a sense of injury. "If I love you, admit it—but don't tease or laugh."

"I do not intend to, Georgia! The question seems to me perfectly natural."

"Yes, I see what you mean," sighed Miss Grosvenor. "Well, if I refuse him, he could not accuse me of having trifled. If I accept him, I think I know myself sufficiently to be certain he would have no grounds for complaint."

"And you could be happy?"

"Oh, happy!" repeated Georgia fretfully, then added, "surely I ought! He offers me just the life for which I am fitted. My ambition is vicarious, I fancy, and sharing his career would satisfy it fully."

"Then if you want to marry from ambition, say yes at once and end the matter."

"Not simply from that motive, any more than from a mere desire to be rich—you can't think so meanly of me."

"I don't think meanly of you at all."

"Respect—esteem—sympathy! What other sensible reasons could a woman have for marrying?"

"None, if we regard marriage as a civil contract—an ordinary partnership which can be dissolved without trouble, without scandal," Phillis answered. "But you can't make marriage that; it is the joining of two lives so closely, that if they do not form one existence, wretchedness must ensue. Think of living year after year with a man you do not love—flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. Ugh! I will never do it, if I live to the age of Sarah, or any other of the female patriarchs."

She began speaking calmly enough, but closed her sentence with such force that both she and Georgia laughed, though the latter looked some-

what pale and uneasy. She saw that Phillis French was watching her, and presently said in a languid tone,—

"I fancy few people in this age regard matrimony in that exceedingly elevated, enthusiastic fashion—at least people who live in what we call the world."

"I should say, from what I have read, that among the favoured class you mention, matrimony is an affair of buying and selling."

"Oh, of course, that is just the nonsense of novel writers."

"I am glad to hear it," said Phillis. "Certainly it would never be in your case. I know that—therefore, if you are content with respect and—oh, all the moral words you named—why, marry your Mr Caruthers and receive my blessing."

"The only sensible basis for marriage!" Georgia repeated with increased decision. Then there followed a brief silence which somehow disturbed her, and she asked quickly, "What are you thinking about, P. French? Staring out over the garden like a 'Sybil'?"

"This, if you want to know," replied Phillis, facing her again. "Suppose that, after marrying on that basis of reason, a woman met a man whom she loved, what then?"

"No decent, clean-minded woman would allow

herself even to recognise the sentiment under such circumstances," cried Georgia, with a sort of desperation.

"Still, a good many women, refined and pure, have fallen into such difficulties," Phillis answered, a tremor of pity in her voice.

"Poor, weak creatures, not worthy the name!" asserted Georgia, with a hardness so unlike her usual sentiments that she expected her friend to expostulate, but Phillis only observed,—

"They say, too, that very often after marriage men are not content with simple esteem; they want the woman's heart."

"Then the man would be breaking his pledge, —would prove himself false to the terms he had accepted."

"What could the woman do? Leave him?"

"A separation! Oh! Phil, Phil!"

"Then she would have to live on. To drag on and suffer," said Phillis.

"She must make herself sure of the man in advance."

"Can he be sure of himself?" Phillis asked.

"People gradually grow towards each other when there is a community of tastes and interests," said Georgia. "As for love-matches, you know as well as I that they seldom turn out well."

"Matches made from romance—fancy—very youthful impulse—do not, I admit."

"And generally love is nothing else!" cried Georgia. "There is such a thing as love, but I don't believe that one human being out of scores—oh, thousands—ever knows the feeling; a good many people are not capable of it. I'm not, for instance."

Phillis French meditated again, then she said,—

"Since you are so thoroughly convinced what is best for you, I am surprised that you have been so long making up your mind."

"It must be just because I am a born procrastinator! I know what I ought to do. I am sure I mean to do it. Still, I keep putting off—putting off!"

"Well, my dear, nobody can help you."

"That's what Maurice says; Aunt Conyngham doesn't think so, and she has dosed me with advice till I wonder she has not brought me to hate the subject."

"But did not her opinions agree with yours?"

"I suppose it is her way of stating them which irritates me. She is so terribly worldly and hard."

"And I've heard you often pride yourself on being worldly too."

"Not pride myself. I admit that I am."

"Are you sorry for it?"

"Oh, I don't know! I'm what life has made me, and must be satisfied. Other people too must be satisfied to take me as I am," cried Georgia, with the fretful intonation coming again into her voice.

"You'll excuse me. I think that's trash. Of course I am only offering my humble opinion," said Phillis French very meekly.

"You despise me, Phillis!" exclaimed Georgia.

"No; I am sorry for you," she replied.

"I don't just see why," said Georgia, colouring.

"Perhaps you will some day," returned Miss French, fixing her with a glance so penetrating that Georgia grew confused and troubled. She said hastily,—

"Well, I don't mean to run away yet, so I have still time to reflect."

Then she remembered that only the night before she had determined to go at once, and felt vexed enough with her own inconsistencies.

"Still time," echoed Phillis, in that oracular, mysterious way of hers, which so often exasperated her friend.

"All the same, I know my mind is made up," persisted Georgia with an obstinacy which seemed uncalled for; except on the supposition that she

was trying to convince herself against her own convictions. She feared that Phillis might tell her as much, but that young lady only answered,—

"Then you can be quite at rest and enjoy your quiet."

"Y—yes, now I have got over my fright. You were dreadfully wicked last night, Phil."

"But you promised to forgive me!"

"Only I wonder you don't like Denis Bourke, and he you."

"You see there are no worldly considerations to influence us, and we don't regard respect as a sufficient basis for marriage."

"Don't tease! You will both find out at last!"

"Miss Grosvenor among the prophets!" cried Phillis. "Well, my dear, I can only say that, judging from Denis's performance when he lunched here yesterday, he has not gone very far. I told him he reminded me of the young woman of Deal, with her raspberry jam and seven platefuls of veal."

Georgia laughed; if Bourke did not care for Phillis, anything which went to show that Phillis did not appear to think he was indulging a fancy for any other woman, she found a comfort.

"But you must like somebody, sooner or later, Phil," she said.

"Why any more than you?"

"I said like. I can go so far."

"I don't mind telling you that there is something which would keep me from ever liking a man in the way you mean," replied Phillis calmly. "You need not look to see if I mean it. I am in earnest; but that is all I intend to say."

"Phil, was I right? Has there been something worrying you during these last days?" demanded Georgia with eager sympathy.

"Yes! But something entirely unconnected with any one near me! Now, I have reason to think I worried myself needlessly."

Her suspicion that Phillis's life held some painful secret was so strengthened by these words, that Georgia could not resist saying,—

"Phil, if you were ever bothered and I could help, you would let me? You would prove that we are friends?"

"Yes," Phillis answered, as quietly as before. She rose, and began a minute examination of the milk-pans; presently she turned towards Georgia again, laid a hand on each of her shoulders, and said, "Georgia, you are as good as gold. Ever so much better than you know. Here comes Sykes, and I must scold him, so run away and don't make me lose any more time."

## CHAPTER IV.

IN the day which ended this fresh week, the two young men went out shooting, and late in the afternoon Georgia proposed to Phillis that they should go and meet the pair as they came down from the hills. But Phillis was detained by the appearance of Miss Raines with some needlework she had been entrusted with, and which was not accomplished according to that young lady's over fastidious ideas.

"Don't you stop," she said to Georgia. "I must struggle with that lath-and-plaster woman. I'll find you by the pond or in the meadow. I shall be sure to see you all as you come down the hill."

"Oh, let the work go! it will do well enough," pleaded Georgia.

"Use towels hemmed in that fashion!" cried Phillis French indignantly. "Never! I'd wipe

my face on a leaf first. No, no; that antique virgin has been paid in advance for her performance, and she shall not put me off with imitation sewing. I shall tell her she must have forgotten to put on her spectacles,—that will hurt her worse than anything else I could say."

"Poor Miss Raines!" laughed Georgia. "I foresee that she will pass a very bad quarter of an hour. Well, I shall take a walk; those lazy men won't get back for another hour. Good-bye. "I'll meet you at the lake."

Miss Raines was not an easy person to vanquish, and she stood up gallantly to the contest. But she had to yield at length, as experience must have taught her would be the case when she attempted to impose on Phillis. Perhaps the spinster enjoyed the struggle; for she did not own herself defeated until she had gone through every phase of emotion, from anger to pathos. She went away, as she always did after similar discussions, with a profound respect for her conqueror, because more than a match for her powers, something, Miss Raines often declared, which no other woman in the county could boast. As for counting any man even as her equal, that Miss Raines would have scorned to do; indeed, she seemed to regard

male humanity as a lamentable failure on the part of nature, only atoned for by her success where the feminine sex was concerned.

Phillis French set out for her walk, but found so much to attract her attention, that her progress was slow. Once in the wood the spell deepened. She had a fancy that nature was full of rhymes ; the leaves murmuring in cadence with the song of the brook, the breeze continuing the strain—all in harmony, down to the chirp of the tiniest insect that tuned its infinitesimal pipe among the odorous mosses.

When she reached the lake Georgia was not in sight, so she stopped to rest on a fallen tree-trunk, gazing out across the bright expanse of water, and watching the lights and shadows flicker over its surface, like troops of many-coloured birds.

She was not absorbed, as nine people out of ten would have been, in some day-dream : her mind remained concentrated on the lovely scene, and enjoyed its every detail. The circumstances of her life had taught her to cultivate this enviable faculty to its full extent, so that, in seasons of the deepest anxiety, she was able to put dreary reflections by, except when a necessity for decision upon any point rendered earnest thought necessary. Even then she wasted no time in

wondering why this or that must be so. She bent all her energies to the study of what mode of action would most quickly ameliorate the situation.

She was in one of her sunniest moods to-day, —a reaction from the uneasy suspense of the previous week; that set at rest, her elastic spirits had sprung up with renewed vigour.

"The Lady of the Lake, the spirit of the waters," said a laughing voice behind her. "By what title must one address your highness, in order to ask permission to intrude upon your solitude?"

She turned her head and saw Maurice Peyton beside her, looking wonderfully handsome in his shooting dress; his gun slung over his shoulder, his hat off, showing the rich mass of auburn curls, damp from the exertion of a long tramp.

"Don't bother me with rhymes," said she; "I'd as lief you flung conundrums at me."

"Did I make a rhyme? You see that comes of being a born poet; I fall into them unconsciously," replied he.

"Take care you don't fall hard enough to hurt yourself," retorted she. "Have you succeeded in murdering anything?"

He held up a brace of quail and a partridge.

"These are for your grandmother," he observed.

"You will find her at the house," she answered.

"Thanks; perhaps I had better go there," he said, half nettled at her manner.

"She will be very glad to see you, I have no doubt," replied Phillis, with preternatural gravity.

"Apparently that is more than her grand-daughter can say for herself," he remarked, still a little stiff, and inclined to be aggressive after a prolonged battle they had indulged in on the previous evening.

"Her grand-daughter has no necessity for making personal confessions so long as you make them for her,—such apt ones, too!" said Phillis.

"I see you are still in a belligerent mood, Miss French."

"I see that you are still determined that I shall be, Mr Peyton."

"Do you want me to go?" he asked.

"I had not thought."

"I suppose you could tell so much without thinking."

"Yes," said Phillis.

"Then I will wish you good-bye for the present."

"Good-bye," she answered.

He walked away; a few paces off he looked back, and asked, with much suavity,—

"Did you call me, Miss French?"

"I did not, but I will since you want me to, Mr Peyton."

He returned to her side.

"At your service," he said.

"You don't look as if you were," she averred.

"Well, I must admit that after last evening—"

"Ah, yes, you wish to apologise?"

"For your having hurt my feelings?"

"Did I? Well, then, I forgive *you*—human magnanimity could not go further," she said, with a laugh so mischievous and merry that he could not resist joining therein, though he still tried to preserve his injured air.

"Where is Mr Bourke?" she asked. "I trust you have not assassinated him along with the quail."

"He stopped at the house for something; I notice you never forget to ask after him. I wonder if you would do as much for me if I disappeared for a whole week?"

"If you try it we shall be able to discover."

"Now I did not want to quarrel to-day!" cried he, leaving his gun against a tree and sitting down beside her. "But your demons are too powerful for you—is that it? because you certainly seem determined to quarrel."

"That is not just the way I should put the matter."

"But that is my way, so you know it must be the right one. Do you know it?" she continued, as he hesitated about replying. "If you say you do not, I shall not speak to you for three days."

He knew well that she was quite capable of fulfilling her threat, so he hastened to exclaim,—

"Yes—yes—I'll say anything you like."

"That shows what respect you have for truth," returned she. "You are a very ill-brought-up young man, Mr Peyton."

"Upon my word, since I came here, I have been brought up with a vengeance!"

"When I see my duty clearly, I always do it," said Phillis French, with superb complacency. "You owe me a great deal, Sir Maurice."

She looked so exasperatingly pretty that he longed to fall at her feet and kiss her hands, and rave out protestations of love. How much would have been real, how much the effect she produced upon his fancy, he could not have told.

"Indeed, I do," he answered; "you have worried me more—yes, made me suffer more than any woman I ever met."

"Does it seem to be neuralgia?" she asked, assuming an air of grave interest. "Grandma

has a famous lotion for any trouble of that sort."

"I wish her grand-daughter had a little heart," he cried.

"What good would that be?" she asked, with her most tantalising smile, while her eyes seemed daring him to continue; he had ventured further already than he had ever before done.

"It would depend on herself whether it was any good to me," he replied, and as soon as the words were uttered realised that he had gone beyond the limits of flirtation and reached serious ground. How would she receive the speech? What did he mean—was he in earnest? Did he love her, or was it only that she had charmed him by her beauty and her mental gifts, until he was like an intoxicated man, unable to take account of his own emotions?

Phillis sat quite still, looking at him in a somewhat surprised, somewhat meditative fashion; one might have said she was trying to decide what his language really signified. Suddenly she turned her head away, he fancied, but could not be sure that, before she did so, he saw a swift wave of colour pass over her cheeks. He did not reflect—did not pause to question what he intended—what his own feelings were—but he could not resist the impulse which hurried him

on to discover if the inexplicable girl really cared for him.

"Phillis!" he exclaimed. "Phillis!"

She glanced back at him. Yes, her cheeks had taken on a deeper shade of carnation.

"I was christened so, but I don't remember ever giving you permission to use the name," she said, and voice and manner were half forbidding, half provocative, just calculated to urge on the impulsive man.

"Will you give me the right?" he asked.

"The right!" she repeated.

"The privilege—the blessed privilege!" he exclaimed. "Such a sweet name. Phillis! ah, if you knew how often I have said it over and over to myself, and wondered if the time would ever come when you might permit me to address you by it!"

Great heavens! what was he saying? What influence impelled him? The excitement of the moment—his innate passion of coquetry—or did he love her? Whatever the feeling, it was too strong for him to resist, though even amid the hurry of his thoughts he recognised that, after this, he could never get back to their former relations—half friendship, half flirtation—and if she took him in earnest—if she cared! Then he was speaking again before the swift reflections had fairly coursed through his brain.

"Will you permit me—may I call you Phillis?" he demanded, with his eager eyes upon her.

"The people who really like me call me P. French; how would that compromise suit you?" she asked.

Though she spoke playfully, the calmness of her face was somewhat disturbed. Her lips quivered slightly, and the rose tints came and went in her cheeks; her eyes were cast down so that he could not read their language. He could not tell whether she might be jesting—whether she were at least partially serious; and he must know—he must! Afterward, he might reproach himself for having been ungenerous, unmanly even—might feel an utter villain if proved to himself not to be in earnest, and so were to cause her pain. But just now he was too thoroughly subjugated by his master passion (in which it seemed to him that real feeling mingled) to reflect; he must know if she cared—he must.

He looked splendidly handsome at this moment; it would have been difficult for any woman, unless her heart were fully occupied, not to have been moved by that combination of physical and intellectual beauty.

"Would that suit?" she asked, playing with some parti-coloured leaves she had picked up.

"No," he said; "I want something more than all your friends share—something for myself alone. Don't laugh—don't tease! I swear, so perplexing a creature never lived! No woman ever owned such fascinations either; you would turn the head of a saint—oh, Phillis, Phillis!"

He stopped short; she had lifted her eyes,—two daggers in the sunlight could not have sent a hotter blaze into his. She leaned back so as to rest against the tree, and still fixed him with that imperious gaze.

"You had better go no further," she said coldly; "a moderate degree of impertinence I can endure, but an insult I should never forgive."

"An impertinence — an insult — good God!" he exclaimed, so excited now that he would have hurried on to assert that he loved her—ask her to become his wife,—but she gave him no opportunity.

"I will exonerate you so far as to admit that I do not think you meant it; but it was an impertinence," she said. "So you could not be content? Your man's miserable vanity impelled you to discover whether your fascinations had not touched the simple country girl's heart. You wanted that zest for your pastime! Whether

the girl suffered was no matter; you wanted something to smile over when you are gone; to be able to say, 'Poor thing, she was awfully fond of me!'"

She spoke rapidly, but with no excitement; her voice was so cold that it seemed to freeze all traces of scorn or bitterness out of her bitter words.

"Great heavens! how can you misjudge me so?" he began, and then stopped, convicted by his conscience and heartily ashamed. Now he knew that he was in earnest, and would have given the world to make her believe in his love, but he felt that he never could—she had read his mind like a book. No after effort, no patient perseverance, would ever convince her of his truth, and as he realised this, he remembered that through his own idiotic vanity he had lost the possible chance of winning a woman whose affection would be better worth possessing than that of any he had ever met.

"Ah," said she, "you have the grace to be ashamed—you could not finish that falsehood! Come, there is a little hope for you yet; there are vain men more petty than you!"

Maurice turned white as death; her taunts roused him to fury, yet he recognised their justice. He felt utterly degraded, but his anger helped him to a kind of composure.

"I can only beg your pardon," he said; "I did not dream that the expression of respectful admiration could offend you so deeply."

"Oh, that is what your creed calls respectful admiration! I'll tell you what it is in mine. I'm only an ignorant young woman, remember, not accustomed to dealing with grand gentlemen from the great world—"

"Oh!"

"I was speaking!" cried she imperiously. "I call coquetry, which could make a man want to discover if he had touched a woman's heart just to amuse himself, utter baseness!"

"Perhaps if you had heard me out, you might have discovered what I did mean," cried he.

"Perhaps you meant to ask me to marry you," she retorted.

"I did," he answered; and he was so much in earnest that he really believed such had been his intention from the first.

Her eyes softened magically; she glanced at him with her sweetest smile.

"Ah!" she murmured softly. "Well, do you mean to ask me now?"

Another revulsion of feeling on his part,—the indelicacy of the speech shocked him. She cared; she had only wanted to be sure that he

meant to beg her to become his wife; had indulged in a scene just to force him on; behaved like the most hardened husband-hunter to be found among the women in society who had worn out youth and freshness — yes, decent womanly reticence in their pursuit! And he must ask her,—he could not retreat. And there she sat looking at him with that heavenly smile, growing each instant more lovely,—yet her loveliness hateful in his eyes since now he perceived her drift, her artfulness, her treachery.

"Do you?" she asked again.

"Yes," he cried, in a voice so shaken by contending emotions, that even a very acute woman might have believed him moved by passion. "Will you marry me?"

She remained silent for an instant—an instant which seemed an age to him. He was so disappointed in her; he had thought her so frank, so feminine, so true; and to find her as artful and calculating as the worldly creatures whom he abhorred, was a terrible shock. He waited for her to speak; she could answer; he had done his part.

"It is very kind of you," said she plaintively.

She stopped, so he had to speak; all he could manage to articulate was,—

"Kind is an odd word to employ."

"Very pretty of you, then—very proper, if you prefer. My best thanks, Mr Peyton; but circumstances, over which I have no control, compel me to decline your flattering offer."

She was perfectly in earnest, he could see that. His mind was in a stranger whirl than before; he heard himself saying, without in the least knowing what he meant,—

"I suppose I must not ask what circumstances?"

"First, because I am not in want of a husband at present," said Phillis in a methodical tone; "secondly, because I cannot fancy myself selecting (admire my choice of words) you, if you were the only man on the face of the earth."

"I thank you!" cried he bitterly.

"I really think you ought," said she; "and I hope the little lesson may be of service to you."

Now, man like, an injured feeling became prominent in his bewilderment.

"So it is you who have been amusing yourself—flirting!" he exclaimed, but was conscious that his voice sounded too cross for his reproaches to possess any pathos. "It seems to be my feelings—the possibility of my being hurt—which was of no consequence."

Phillis began to laugh.

"Take care," she said; "you have got safely out of a bad scrape, don't rush into a worse one. If you wax sentimental a second time, I may accept you after all."

Again Maurice could have sworn that his feeling was real; the delight of finding that she was not worldly and crafty, sent her higher in his esteem than before.

"If I could convince you that I had been in earnest!" he exclaimed.

She rose at once.

"If you were to talk any more nonsense, you would never speak to me again," she said. "There are limits to my patience. I warn you that you have reached them."

"Oh, I will be careful not to offend you by any further expression of feeling," said he with bitter irony.

"You see," she said calmly, "now that you have forced me to show you that, though simple, I am not quite an idiot, you would not amuse me any longer."

"I have amused you, then?"

"Very much," and her hearty laughter proved the truth of her assertion. "Come, now, are we friends or foes?"

Seven men out of ten would have made asses of themselves, but Maurice was too clever to do

that. There was but one way if he wished her to consider him sensible—worth liking—he must accept his lesson, and behave afterwards as if no explosion had taken place.

"Friends," said he, holding out his hand.

"Good," pronounced Phillis French. "We shall get on admirably now. What on earth can have become of Georgia—unless she has met Denis?"

"No, Denis was not coming down at present."

They walked back through the wood and reached the field beyond, Phillis talking as gaily as if no storm had arisen, and Maurice doing his part very well, though he was still a good deal dazed, most of all by the consciousness which grew stronger and stronger, that he had from the first been much more in earnest than he knew, and that now he was as many fathoms deep in love as any woman could have desired. But would Phillis ever be brought to believe this, and if he succeeded in convincing her, would she ever learn to care for him. That seemed very doubtful, and Maurice's heart sank. Never in his life had he felt so humble, so diffident in regard to his own powers as at this moment.

"Hark!" exclaimed Phillis suddenly; "I am sure that was Georgia's voice—something has frightened her."

Away she ran with the fleetness of a wild animal, and Maurice ran too. They turned an angle of the Halder thicket just in time to see Georgia sink fainting in Denis Bourke's arms.

## CHAPTER V.

MISS GROSVENOR had wandered away up towards the hills. Just as she remembered that it must be late enough to go in search of Phillis, she saw Maurice in the distance, descending the zig-zag path which led from Bourke's house to the lake, and said to herself,—

"He will walk home with Phil. I needn't go now. They don't especially want me, and I feel too moody to laugh at their nonsense."

For indeed her state of mind was the reverse of cheerful. Only that morning she had received a letter from Mr Caruthers which contained cogent reasons why she should arrive without delay at a decision in regard to his proposal, and she found herself as far off. Oh, it seemed to her farther from such possibility, as she had been weeks and weeks before.

The American minister at a prominent con-

tinental court desired to send in his resignation. The President had privately offered the position to Mr Caruthers, who knew that his nomination would be readily confirmed by the Senate when the winter session began.

He wrote Georgia that her response would regulate his conduct. If she favoured his suit, he should accept the ministership; if compelled still to live his life alone, incessant occupation would be best for him, and he should toil on in his arduous professional career.

The letter was admirably conceived and written; straightforward, manly, and replete with feeling. He asked her to pardon his long and determined pursuit, and assured her that, though the time originally set for her decision had come and passed, only this new aspect of his affairs would have induced him to urge her so strongly to end his suspense. He told her that an affirmative answer would make him a happier man than before meeting her he had ever expected to be; if condemned to disappointment, he should at least hold to the honour of ranking himself among her most devoted friends.

Georgia saw clearly a truth against which she had hitherto—somewhat obstinately she feared now—closed her eyes. Herbert Caruthers loved her; he was not animated by the calm, decorous

sentiments with which his wooing had begun. He loved her! He did not talk of his affection, but it breathed through every line, and Georgia knew that a refusal might very probably sadden his whole future, for at his age he was less likely to seek consolation elsewhere than a younger man would have been.

But the very fact of his loving her must render her marrying him a rank injustice! What had she to give in return? While she believed him influenced by esteem and sympathy, she could bestow as much as he offered—but love! And if she were to say yes, the marriage must follow so soon. Somehow the bare idea sent a shiver through her veins! Yet what insanity it would be to decline his offer, and since he was content with such feeling as she could bestow, why refuse? What personal reason had she for so doing?

Again, as had of late often happened when discussing the matter with herself, something seemed to stir at her heart as if there were a secret hidden there which she was afraid to contemplate. But what possible secret? Nonsense—none. Her own absurd fright when she found the sketch Bourke had made of her, aided by Phillis's wicked melodramatic performance later, had roused this fear in her mind. It was

too silly! She, Georgia Grosvenor, the worldly and ambitious, suddenly to turn romantic and indulge in girlish dreams. No, no! Whatever decision she might come to in regard to Mr Caruthers, no sentimental vision, no poetical myth would influence her—she could be certain of that.

While meditating, she had walked to and fro near the foot of the hill, sometimes slowly, sometimes hurrying on as if towards some definite goal. At length she suddenly discovered that she was very tired, and sat down to rest on a flat rock which afforded a very comfortable seat, as the almost perpendicular ledge from whence it projected formed a back, rising to a considerable height, bald and bare, except for a few juniper and whortleberry bushes that had lodged their roots in the crevices.

When Georgia first came to stay at the Nest, she had rather avoided the place, declaring that the lodge with its numerous chinks and openings, and the broad stone bench near the bottom, exposed all day to the sun, seemed to her especially designed by nature as an abode for snakes, and snakes were her horror. But Phillis and Bourke, and everybody about, had assured her that she would never see a reptile of any sort there; up on the mountain, even rattle-

snakes were plentiful enough, but only twice within ten years had a member of the species been known to venture so far down. Familiarity with the spot, more than argument, had caused Georgia gradually to forget her fears—forget them indeed so completely that she often came there and rested in the soft autumn sunshine.

It was very still; now and then a distant sheep bell tinkled or a crow circled over her head, calling hoarsely, or a company of thrushes settled for a few moments in the group of walnut trees near and discussed their autumn flight, apparently with much diversity of opinion, and once a rabbit scuttled past and hit himself in the under brush; but otherwise there was scarcely a sound to break the deep reverie into which Georgia allowed her mind to float.

She was roused suddenly by a noise so peculiar that it could not fail to attract her attention, absorbed as she was—a noise more like the shaking together of a string of metallic beads than anything else. At the same instant a chipmuck darted out from a clump of bushes and ran directly across her lap. She turned and saw, scarcely more than four feet distant, a huge rattlesnake just coiling for a spring.

She jumped from the rock; as she did so, the

snake sprang. She felt a weight on her skirt, and looked back. The reptile's length had enabled him to strike the hem of her dress, and with such force that his fangs settled so deeply into the woollen material that he could not extricate them.

Georgia uttered a despairing cry and tried to run, dragging the hideous wriggling creature after her. She was conscious that in another moment she should faint, and be utterly helpless, when he succeeded in freeing himself, which he was struggling fiercely to do; his tail lashing her garments in his fury with blows which might have been given by an iron bar.

A second time Georgia cried out desperately; as she did so, round the further end of the ledge dashed Denis Bourke, calling,—

"Miss Grosvenor, Miss Grosvenor!"

She pointed with her hand—she could not speak. He saw the snake—she was gazing at it over her shoulder in horrified fascination; its fiery eyes gleaming straight into her own. It succeeded in liberating its fangs—gave one low, dreadful hiss—at the same instant Bourke gained her side. He carried a heavily loaded walking-stick; a well-directed blow descended directly on the reptile's head; another and another. The creature slowly straightened to

its full length, the ominous rattle sounding faintly once again, then it lay still.

"You are safe!" cried Bourke. "Safe!"

Georgia heard—realised that the danger was over, strove to collect herself to speak, staggered forward, and he caught her just in time to keep her from falling. She felt herself held close to his heart—heard him moan.

"Oh, my God! My darling!—my life!"

He was so mad with a horrible fear that she might have been bitten before he reached the spot, that he lost all power of restraint.

"Georgia," he groaned, "dearest, you are not hurt?"

She could only shake her head, then she slowly fainted in his arms. The last conscious thought in her mind—it came too with startling distinctness, paralysed as were her faculties—was that he loved her. In that instant she knew also what had been the secret in her own heart, from any recognition of which she had so determinedly shut her eyes during these past days—she loved him in return.

When Georgia's senses returned she was lying on the ground with her head in Phillis's lap, Maurice bending over, Denis Bourke standing at a little distance. She glanced from one white

face to the other, tried to smile, to lift her head, but Phillis held her fast, saying,—

"Lie still a little! You were not hurt?"

"No—no—he was fast to my dress—oh!" The unutterable horror of these seconds came back with such force that she could not continue; she closed her eyes and lay silent in Phillis's arms. Presently she said with a faint smile, "I am not much of a heroine, you see!"

Maurice endeavoured to answer playfully, but his voice broke—he could only lean forward and kiss her forehead. Phillis was for once so unnerved that she could find no words—could only fold Georgia closer in her embrace, while Denis Bourke stood aloof pale and silent, looking at them with eyes which showed a hungry envy of their liberty to give expression to their solicitude and love.

At length Georgia could sit up, and was sufficiently restored so that they might think of returning homeward. Phillis and Maurice essayed to talk, asking little common-place questions as to how she felt; endeavouring to speak lightly, sensible enough to know that the wisest thing was to occupy her with any trifle that would come uppermost and so keep her mind from dwelling on what had happened; but Bourke did not attempt to aid them;

he still stood leaning on his stick, gazing at Georgia.

As they helped her to rise, she glanced towards him for the first time, saying somewhat tremulously,—

"I have not thanked Mr Bourke yet."

She held out her hand; he stepped forward and took it for an instant in his, looking wistfully down at the white fingers as a man might regard some priceless treasure placed within his reach only to be withdrawn, and leave him lonelier from that momentary possession.

"God bless you, old man!" Maurice exclaimed in a choked voice—tried to laugh, and ended by uttering a sound suspiciously like a repressed sob. Phillis French stole a quick glance at him; nobody perceived it, but there was an enthusiastic admiration therein which neither his beauty nor his wit had ever won from her.

Georgia's eyes met Bourke's; as Maurice spoke she gently pushed her hand upwards; Denis's lips softly brushed her palm. She knew it was wrong; she knew that he must be aware she had caught the wild words he uttered in his mortal terror, and this action on her side might appear a tacit encouragement. But she could not resist the impulse which impelled her, and as she felt the pressure of his lips, she realised

anew that this man loved her—that she loved him—and that they must part for ever!

She withdrew her hand; Phillis and Maurice supported her on either side, and they walked slowly along the path, Bourke following. Now and then Phillis or Maurice strove to jest, but death had been too near; it was a pain to try to ignore what had happened; so after a little they went on in silence.

When they reached the house, Phillis insisted on Georgia's lying down upon a lounge in the sitting-room. Grandma administered one of the wonderful remedies she always had on hand to fit every case, and declared that her patient must keep quiet and not speak or be spoken to for a while. So the two young men very unwillingly took their leave, Maurice telling Phillis that they would return later. On the way they stopped to look at the dead snake; it measured good four feet and a-half, and the rattles, which Bourke cut off, numbered eleven.

"My God! Denis, if you had not happened to come by this path!" Maurice exclaimed.

"Yes—don't talk about it now; better think of something else."

They walked on rather silently after that. On their arrival at the house they found Mistress Tabitha in a state of excitement, because they

had promised to be back half-an-hour earlier, and she feared that her dish of mountain hook trout baked in cream might have suffered in consequence of the delay. But the trout proved excellent, so Tabitha's mind was set at rest. Bourke brought out a bottle of his choicest claret, and the meal passed off pleasantly enough, though neither of the young men yet felt equal to any allusion to what had occurred.

Later, they strolled back to the Nest through the moonlight. Grandma assured them that Georgia was better, but so much shaken that, after drinking some tea, she had gone to bed.

Presently Phillis came downstairs and told Peyton that Georgia wished to see him.

"But you must not stop; she is still a good deal excited, and ought not to talk," Phillis said. As he hurried off, she added to Bourke, "Georgia wished me to bid you good-night for her."

"I hope she will sleep," was all he answered —turned away and sat down by grandma, talking with her upon some unimportant subject connected with the affairs of the neighbourhood.

Phillis stood leaning against one of the rustic posts which supported the verandah, looking out into the moonlight till Maurice appeared again, saying,—

"She seems all right, I think."

"She will be in the morning," Phillis replied, "I must go and sit with her till she falls asleep, so I shall take my leave of you both. Grandma will let you stop a while if you are very quiet and discreet."

But they knew that grandma's early bedtime was near, so did not avail themselves of the permission. After bidding the old lady good-night, Maurice held out his hand to Phillis somewhat hesitatingly. She presented hers without a shade of difference from her ordinary manner, speaking a few pleasant words, apparently utterly oblivious of the scene in the wood, which, now that he was free enough from anxiety about his sister to recall it, caused Maurice a thrill of such strangely-mingled sensations that he could not tell whether he felt most humiliated or excited.

It might have hurt his vanity anew had he known that Phillis French gave the matter no thought. She would later, and doubtless torment him enough, but at present her mind was entirely occupied with Georgia and Georgia's affairs. Phillis had a faculty of reading people's secrets almost equal to that possessed by a clairvoyant, and she comprehended perfectly the new revelation which had come to her friend, confident it was that rather than the fright which had so completely unnerved the proud woman.

"Come in, Phil; I hear you," Georgia called, as her hostess paused at the chamber door. "Sit down here by the bed; it quiets me to have you hold my hand."

"I want you to go to sleep as soon as you can," returned Phillis, as she complied with the request.

"I will. I'm afraid you must all think me a dreadfully cowardly idiot," said Georgia, with a little nervous laugh.

"Indeed, we don't!" cried Phillis indignantly. "You were as courageous as possible."

"Maurice has gone?"

"Yes. I said good-night for you to Denis Bourke. He hopes you will sleep."

"Thanks," Georgia answered in an undertone.

She was somewhat restless for a while, but gradually what she always laughingly called Phillis's magnetic influence helped her to grow quiet. At last she said suddenly,—

"I am a coward though, Phil, at bottom. I used to think myself very brave, but I am not."

Phillis understood that she was not referring to the accident, but to the new aspect which life had assumed, and the puzzle which her own character became under the influence of this change. Still Phillis only said,—

"I suppose we all feel like that sometimes."

"I used to pride myself on my determination," Georgia continued, in a broken fashion, as if thinking aloud; "my ability, when I had made up my mind, to be firm and settled; and now-a-days I seem as unsteady as a weather-cock, and just when I think I am most decided, I discover I am more at sea than ever."

"Oh, how you are mixing up your comparisons!" replied Phillis playfully. "You are not just to yourself either. I fancy all of us, as we grow older, find it difficult to have the same serenely blind confidence in our own decision that we had at sixteen."

"Perhaps so," sighed Georgia. "But I don't seem to know myself in this new aspect, and I don't like that. I hate to feel a hesitating idiot —not to be sure what I really want to do."

"Patience," said Phillis; "you will work your way out into the daylight at last."

"At present the mist is so thick I can't tell in which direction to turn," half whispered Georgia.

"Then stand still, and wait till the mist lifts a little," Phillis replied.

"Ah!" ejaculated Georgia, in a voice which showed that the advice gave her a certain sensation of content; but presently she resumed in an

altered tone, "I have been standing still so long, I must make up my mind now. I declare, Phil, I am half sorry I ever came here—not but what I have enjoyed my stay."

"I hope so, Georgia."

"And I love you—you know that. But, you see, this quiet makes the old life seem so noisy, so hurried, it is like going away out of an enchanted land, where all was still, to leave this place."

"Yet you would not like to live here always?"

"How could I? But just now it seems as if that would be pleasant; but I could not do it. No; I am only fit for the existence I was reared in; it is ridiculous of me to feel as if I wished not to take it up again. Oh dear, how like a goose I am talking! Are you laughing at me, Phil?"

"Indeed, I am not."

"I'm such a selfish creature—that must lie at the bottom," pursued Georgia. "I must always come first—that everlasting I."

"After all, one's self has to be thought of when it is one's future, one's whole life, that is under consideration," Phillis answered gently, smoothing her friend's hair as she spoke—voice and manner so tender and sympathetic, that even an entire stranger would have found comfort therein.

"I suppose one must," Georgia assented slowly. "Yet I don't know—I—," she left her sentence unfinished; Phillis still gently stroked her hair, but did not speak. After a while Miss Grosvenor asked abruptly, "Phil, would you have to be in love in order to marry?"

"Indeed, I should—very deeply too," Phillis responded promptly.

There was another pause, then Georgia said,—

"I must try to sleep! Sing to me, Phil—softly, so as not to wake grandma."

Phillis sang a quaint old ballad in a half voice, and Georgia lay quiet, with her face turned away, but Phillis knew she was weeping, knew too that tears would relieve her, steady her nerves, and enable her to rest.

And before long Georgia sank into a sound slumber—she was too thoroughly exhausted for even the confusion in her mind to keep her awake. Phillis remained by her for some time, still stroking her hair and gazing down into her face with eyes full of tenderness, then she rose and went noiselessly into her own room, leaving both doors open, so that she might be sure to hear in case Georgia should waken and need companionship.

It was late the next morning when Miss Grosvenor woke from her long, dreamless repose.

Through the open window she caught the tones of her brother and grandma, as they sat conversing in the verandah. She raised herself, and listened breathlessly for another voice, and experienced a sensation of mingled relief and disappointment, because it did not reach her ear. Phillis was on the watch, and entered as soon as she heard Georgia stirring. Her voice shook a little when she began to speak, and she held her friend fast in a warm embrace, but she speedily controlled herself, and rattled on in her usual gay fashion, while assisting Georgia to dress.

"We have had such happenings, G. G.!" she cried. "That greedy red heifer nearly choked herself with half a pumpkin; there's a new litter of the prettiest little pink and white pigs ever you saw; Miss Raines has ruined one of your finest white jackets by applying an iron too hot, and at present is moaning like a Banshee in the wash-house. Cinders has broken my Wedgewood teapot, and—"

"Mercy!" interrupted Georgia. "Isn't the list ended yet?"

"There is nothing else, except that Denis Bourke has gone to Philadelphia. He received a telegram that sent him off at daylight, and he'll not be back till to-morrow evening."

"No bad news, I hope?" Georgia asked with well-feigned composure.

"Oh no! business of some sort. Your brother is downstairs flattering grandma in the most outrageous manner, and you shall have your breakfast in the porch, as a reward for having slept so well. Ninny has made you corn-muffins as a tender attention, so get yourself ready and descend to the lower regions! I am off to the laundry, for now that Ann Raines has begun to go astray, if I leave her unwatched, she will burn every stitch of our clothing before she returns to sanity."

Georgia joined grandma and Maurice, and with their eyes upon her, did not dare to neglect her breakfast, though she had no appetite. There was a certain restraint between the brother and sister, but each remained unconscious that the other felt it. Georgia feared Maurice might perceive some sign of her odd state of mind, and he was so possessed by his new sentiments towards Phillis, that he had constantly to guard against betrayal thereof.

He discovered where the young lady had gone, and after a while departed in search of her. Georgia reposed for a time in grandma's society, then went back to her own room. She did not venture to dwell upon the adventure of the pre-

vious day; beyond a hearty thankfulness for her preservation, she put the fright and horror as much as possible out of her mind.

Turning over her portfolios and books by way of occupation, she came upon her half-finished letter to Herbert Caruthers—the letter she had begun, meaning to tell him that she would become his wife. The sight of the page, and the recollection of her intentions, sent an icy chill through her whole frame. She tore the sheet with nervous energy, and hid the fragments in shuddering haste, as if evidences against her of some crime punishable by human laws. The idea that she could ever have meant to complete and send the letter, oppressed her with a sensation of horrible guilt. She seemed to have lived years since that epistle was begun; her former resolves presented themselves like hideous sins with which she had been weak enough to tamper, towards which she had been base enough to incline.

She could never wed Herbert Caruthers—to do so would be moral and physical degradation, for she loved Denis Bourke; useless to bring argument or sophistry between her and that truth—she loved Denis! What was she to do? Marry him? Impossible! Throw away her life—give up the world—bury herself alive? No, she could not—her affection did not possess the

depth necessary for such sacrifice! Indeed, the whole thing was a mad folly—it would pass—it must! Ah, if Denis were different—if he would make a career for himself—with his talents and energy he could easily do so! But he was bound fast to his impracticable theories, and she could not join him therein; no woman living could be so little fitted to attempt such renunciation of this worlds pleasures and splendours!

She thought of hurrying away before Bourke returned, but if she went to her aunt, she must meet Mr Caruthers; she could not do that yet, nor could she visit gay friends; she must remain at the Nest for the present—she must battle against her own insanity and subdue it.

While Georgia suffered the torment of her thoughts, Maurice had peeped into the laundry and fluttered Miss Raines, but not Phillis. She was fluting some dainty ruffles, and she allowed him to sit down by the table, making him undergo that species of persecution which is at once sweet and bitter to endure, but wholly delightful to look back upon.

## CHAPTER VI.

GEORGIA wished, with the remorseful heartiness we all fling into wishes when framed too late, that she had weeks before told Bourke of the terms on which she stood with Mr Caruthers.

It would have saved them both trouble, because at that time she could have declared, without any violation of the truth, that she meant to marry her rich suitor. It would have been, too, the only honest, straightforward course after the discovery of her portrait in Bourke's house warned her that she might possess the power to disturb his peace of mind. Now he could almost claim the right to reproach her for having trifled with his feelings, and if he pressed her close, she should be unable to take refuge in the declaration that, sooner or later, she proposed to become Mr Caruthers's wife.

It was late in the afternoon of the day suc-

ceeding Bourke's return, not yet the hour for him and Maurice to appear at the Nest, so she went into the garden, intending later to seek Phillis's protection, and so avoiding risk of the private interview with Denis, which she knew must come, but longed to defer, though scorning the desire as cowardly.

As she sat in the woodbine arbour she heard a step on the green sward, looked up and saw Bourke before her. One glance at his face showed her that it wore the expression of dogged resolve she had so often seen it assume, and she knew she could not escape the explanation she had weakly hoped to put off still further, even while wishing it uttered and done with.

"How you startled me!" she exclaimed, trying to laugh. "You must come shod with what somebody calls the shoes of silence."

"Oh, I made noise enough," he replied, "but you were too much absorbed to hear—dreaming, I should say."

"I do very little of that even when asleep, and I assure you I am much too prosaic to indulge in anything of the sort during waking hours," she said, hoping that he might notice the warning her words held.

He stood silent, gazing down at her fixedly. Any other man would have returned some laugh-

ing answer, and so rendered conversation easy on her part. She longed to grow vexed with him for standing there mute, as if reflecting over her speech, but could not.

"Where is Maurice?" she asked, with an effort repressing an undignified inclination to run away.

"I left him writing letters, which he declared must be finished for to-night's post."

"I know; they ought to have been written four days ago. I never saw such a creature to procrastinate."

"I never can," replied Bourke; "not that it is any merit, only because I never can find a moment's peace till I have got off my mind whatever has to be done."

"You may be grateful for the inability," she said.

He paid no attention to her remark, just stood looking at her still; she hoped devoutly she might find herself waxing irritated, the sensation would make her task so much easier.

Suddenly he broke the pause,—

"I have told you my secret already, so you know what brings me here."

It was coming; speak he would. She could not even assume an air of not understanding what he meant.

"I am sure to say it all awkwardly," he hurried on, according to his habit when excitement overcame his ordinary slowness, even hesitancy of speech, "but I must say it. You heard me the other day—you know the truth—I love you—I love you! Now, what have you to answer me, Georgia?"

There he stood, seeming to loom taller and bigger than ever, a slight pallor visible through the sun-burn of his complexion; his grey eyes at once so soft and determined; his manner so respectful and constrained, yet, at the same time, so eager and masterful. Everything in looks and words so different from what another man's wooing would have been. She felt quite breathless, frightened too at the sense of subjugation which came over her. And before she could find language he was speaking again.

"You like me a little, you know; you found it out the other day. Don't call me impertinent; you know it is true, and why shouldn't we tell each other the truth? We agreed long ago that subterfuges between men and women are petty and contemptible! You discovered sometime since that I loved you; you found that sketch. I saw you just after you left the house, and you had dropped your handkerchief by the brook. Georgia Grosvenor, what do you mean

to do with my life and yours? Yes, yours, because you care—you care—and you can't put me out of the reckoning. I wish I could say it better, it sounds so rough. But you feel—you must—that no man ever loved you so truly—that—"

"Ah, stop, stop!" she gained voice to articulate. "You—you frighten me!"

And her trembling showed that he did, she so proud, so self-controlled!

He sat down on the bench beside her, saying gently,—

"Forgive me! Poor little girl, I didn't mean to!"

He took her two hands, and she passively permitted him. Great heavens! what was she about? She drew quickly back; he did not attempt to detain the cold fingers.

"You are right," he said, "I will only have what you grant me. Will you give me the dear hands, Georgia?"

He bent forward and gazed straight into her troubled eyes with an expression of tenderness which was like a caress, and set her heart beating so violently that she almost feared he would hear its pulsations What spell had he cast upon her? But she must break it, he must hear the truth.

"Don't—don't talk in that way," she said,

wondering, even in the midst of her agitation, if it could really be she, Georgia Grosvenor, shrinking like a timid school-girl from the man who had come there as a suppliant, and yet behaved like a master, nay, was so, she had to admit. "Listen to me, there are so many things I want to tell you."

"First own that you care for me," he broke in.

"Let me speak!" she exclaimed, with a sudden imperious ring in her voice, but it sprang from desperation.

"You do care — you do!" he persisted. "Georgia, Georgia, you care!"

"Yes, then," she fairly groaned. "But it only makes it the worse for you and me; there can be nothing between us—nothing!"

He smiled down upon her—oh, that beautiful smile, which she had sometimes seen absolutely transfigure his countenance in moments of enthusiasm, but never as it did at this moment.

"Now you may explain," he said, in a low, deep tone, full of content. "You have admitted that you care. Whatever you have to tell, I can keep hope—you care!"

"Oh, I think you are cruel!" cried Georgia, bewildered between the yielding of her heart and the struggle of her will.

"I am not," he answered; "you know I am

not. Speak, Georgia! What do you mean by its being the worse for you and me?"

"I have told you—we must part—I must go away—oh, I ought to have gone long ago!"

Each broken sentence was a confession of her weakness,—she comprehended this,—she saw in his eyes what joy it gave him; he was smiling again.

"Gone where—to what?" he asked. "Amusements—balls—Newport gaieties? You have said you were tired of them; said the excitement wearied you; the constant change an empty sameness after all."

His words were so true. Oh, she was doing her cause no good; she must be strong, firm against herself and him. She exerted her will powerfully, and looked away from his face; she could speak now—could explain.

"Not to those things as the aim of life," she said. "Yes, in that light they are wearisome, but to have them fill a reasonable part of existence, to keep a place in the world, possess interests as I grow older—to—"

Again her momentary control deserted her as she remembered the disclosure she must make, and she cried out nervously,—

"Oh, this is what I really want to tell you!"

"Tell me," he said gently.

"I—I— Ah, what an idiot I am!" she exclaimed, ignominiously forced by emotion to pause again, leaving her avowal unuttered.

"Look at me, Georgia," he whispered.

But she would not—rather she dared not. She kept her eyes fixed on the laurel bush in front of the arbour, trying to count the blossoms, in order to steady her mind a little; he waited in silence.

"I came here for a purpose," she said slowly, when she had regained composure enough to continue. "A man had asked me to marry him—"

"But you were not engaged," he interrupted.

If she could only answer in the affirmative, and so end this painful scene. But her lips refused to frame the falsehood.

"You were not engaged!" he repeated more authoritatively.

"No, then," she cried, with a kind of mild impatience. "I wanted to be quiet—to reflect. His offer was everything I could desire—wealth, position; I respected, admired him. I wanted to have freedom to decide."

"And you could not decide to become his wife, for you did not love him?"

Oh, he was beating her at every point. But she had conquered her temporary prostration: she could be resolute; at any cost, she must end matters.

"I told you I was prosaic," she said, in the coldest tone her voice would assume. "Love is for poetry and novels—it does not belong to the world I live in."

"Don't mock," he said sternly, as she paused, unable to conclude her sentence with the hardness befitting the opinions she expressed.

"At all events, I am not mocking you," she rejoined, hearing her voice begin to shake anew.

"I could forgive that," he replied earnestly, "but you are mocking all the noble instincts of your own nature; oh, it is blasphemy, and you know it."

Again she struggled with herself; she felt ready to weep, and strove with all her might to hide her weakness beneath an icy coating of pride.

"You must allow me to explain," she said haughtily. "My views of life may not please you, but I have a right to them."

"Yes, to your real views; but don't advance the sophistries which you have already found so poor and vain; don't, for your own sake."

"I mean to be honest—I do mean to be," she pleaded, with sudden humility.

"And you will be," he answered. "You are too noble to accept for truths those deceptions which you have tried to force upon yourself as gospel. You know that the idea with which

you came here must be relinquished; you can never marry any man while conscious that you care for another."

"Then I tell you frankly I do not mean to care. I mean to root out the sentiment—live it down," she cried passionately. "That sounds brutal; but I cannot help that. Perhaps it is rude; but I can't help that either. You force me to speak, so you must not be angry."

He bent his head until she could not avoid meeting his gaze, and said softly,—

"Could I be angry when you say you should have something to root out, to live down?"

"You are the most impossible man to deal with that I ever met!" she exclaimed. "I am behaving like a child of fifteen! I should not have said a sentiment—it is just a dream, a folly. Oh, you oblige me to be so hard!"

He only whispered anew,—

"I love you, Georgia—I love you!" Again he held out his hand, adding, "Give me yours, Georgia."

She hesitated an instant; their eyes met. She allowed her fingers to drop shyly into his palm; then reflected that it was only her hesitation, not the act itself, which could be construed as important, and tried to do away with any effect thereof by saying, with a forced laugh,—

"Certainly, friends may shake hands; we have done so scores of times."

But his fingers did not close over hers; he gazed longingly down at the beautiful hand resting in his, then glanced back at her and smiled.

"Georgia! Georgia!" he cried.

Before he could add more, the sound of wheels stopping at the gate became audible. Georgia stepped forward to where she could peep through the thicket of lilac bushes which separated the garden from the lawn. She caught sight of the carriage; a gentleman had descended, and was helping a lady to alight.

"Aunt Conyngham!" exclaimed Georgia in astonishment. "My aunt and Mr Caruthers."

"Ah," said Bourke calmly, "that is the gentleman you tried to bring yourself to marry."

She turned upon him with indignant eyes.

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"I see it in your face. I see, too, that you are not particularly pleased to have him come here, nor your aunt either."

Georgia ran past him without a word, and hastened down the path to meet the new arrivals. Bourke followed leisurely; he could watch the meeting; hear what was said.

"Why, aunt, I can hardly believe my eyes!" cried Georgia.

"My dearest, dearest girl!" responded the elegant lady, and then the two embraced cordially.

"A very handsome woman," thought Bourke; "as obstinate as a mule, and prouder than Lucifer!"

"May I not be spoken to?" asked a pleasant voice, as Georgia and her aunt ended their kiss of salutation.

"How do you do, Mr Caruthers?" Georgia said, turning towards the speaker. Bourke turned too and gazed steadily at the gentleman, trying to form an impartial judgment of his appearance. He was a fine-looking man; rather stately, perhaps a little stiff; but imposing enough, and young enough also, to be likely to prove a dangerous rival, especially when one took into consideration all the worldly advantages on his side. "I hope you are quite well," continued Georgia, as she shook hands with her admirer.

"She does not say she is glad to see him," thought Denis Bourke.

"One hardly needs to ask after your health, Miss Grosvenor," said Mr Caruthers; "I never saw such a change in a few months."

"Wonderfully improved," cried Aunt Conyngham, noticing the tall young man in the background, and wondering who on earth he might

be. "It is positively incredible, Georgia dear!"

"Oh, I wrote you that I had grown both brown and fat," returned Miss Grosvenor, laughing. "But do tell me how you happen to appear in this unexpected fashion? Why, you never gave me the least hint of any such pleasant idea on your part!"

"Explanations will do later," thought Bourke; "I may as well be presented, and make the fact of my existence patent to our aunt and her ally, for of course she supports him tooth and nail."

Before Mrs Conyngham could answer her niece's remark, Bourke stepped forward. He betrayed no signs of the shyness or awkwardness which had roused Georgia's scornful commiseration when he first met her. He was as composed and calm as Mr Caruthers himself to all appearance; inwardly, indeed, he felt a certain glow and elation of spirits; he had a battle to fight, and he meant to fight desperately.

"Aunt Conyngham," said Georgia, "let me present Mr Bourke, an old friend of Maurice's. They used to know each other in England."

"Oh! Delighted, I am sure!" cried Aunt Conyngham, with great cordiality. "An old friend of my bad boy's cannot be a stranger to me, Mr Bourke."

"Thanks," he said, bowing, perfectly at ease under her smiling but searching glance. Georgia saw that he was, and it gratified her.

"Mr Caruthers, let me make you and Mr Bourke acquainted," she continued.

The two men saluted each other, and exchanged a few amiable common-places in tones that suited the words.

"And where is Maurice?" demanded Aunt Conyngham.

"Somewhere about; he was here awhile ago," returned Georgia, glancing at Bourke, as if she rather expected him to offer to go in search of her brother, but he did not appear to catch her idea, and said,—

"He is sure to be along presently."

"And now do tell me, Aunt Conyngham, how you lost your way and strayed into these wilds?" questioned Georgia.

"Found my way, you mean," said her relative, laughing.

"And such a picturesque way too," added Mr Caruthers.

"But that's not an explanation," said Georgia playfully.

At this instant Phillis French and Maurice, who had been for a walk (and a quarrel) appeared at the gate. Mrs Conyngham and Caru-

thers were standing with their backs in that direction, and Peyton got quite close before he recognised the visitors.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, hurrying forward. The new-comers turned, and of course there followed a cordial greeting.

"Oh, you bad boy! to give me this frightful journey in order to have a little of your society," cried the aunt, but even while embracing her nephew, genuinely rejoiced to see her favourite again; she was able to study Phillis, and marvel who the pretty, elegant creature could possibly be.

"Aunt," said Georgia, "this is my dear friend Miss French. I have talked so much about you to her, and written so much about her to you, that I shall expect you to feel like old acquaintances."

"I am very, very happy to meet you, Miss French," said Aunt Conyngham in a delighted tone. But she was so overpowered by surprise, that for once she somewhat forgot her usual tact, and as soon as Georgia had presented Mr Caruthers, she added, "Why, I thought—I—I mean it is the same name, but it surely cannot be Miss French who—who—"

"Oh yes, it is I who keep the boarding-house," cried Phillis French gaily, as Mrs Conyngham hesitated a little over the close of her phrase.

"Then I wish I were fortunate enough to live here," that lady answered quickly, somewhat disturbed by her own *lapsus linguæ*, perceiving too by the expression in Georgia's face that she must be careful where Phillis French was concerned. "It is the loveliest spot I ever saw," and somehow she managed by glance and voice to make her compliment include the mistress of the place. By this time she was holding Phillis's hand in both of hers, and looking at her with an admiration agreeable to witness, and thinking all the while that she wished the girl were at the Antipodes, or the bottom of the sea, or any safe haunt inaccessible to her inflammatory nephew. And now she turned to that young gentleman and said, "So you are astonished to see us, Maurice?"

"I am never astonished," he replied; "it is against my principles."

"Oh, you provoking creature!" said Aunt Conyngham.

"But one is glad to learn that Sir Maurice possesses a principle of any description; eh, Georgia?" added Phillis French, with a laughing freedom which caused Aunt Conyngham inwardly to shiver.

"Don't slander me to my nearest relations, Miss Phillis!" retorted Peyton. "At all events,

I am awfully glad to see you, aunt, if that will atone for not feeling astonished."

His eyes met Phillis French's as he spoke, and her mischievous orbs said so plainly, "You may be glad, but you don't look it!" that he had much ado not to laugh outright.

"You've not yet told me how you found your way here," said Georgia; "and Mr Caruthers seems equally mysterious."

"Only perfectly contented to have found it," returned he, with a bow and smile.

"Sir Charles Grandison revived!" thought Phillis, and began studying his manner, with the express intention of being able to caricature him later for Maurice's and Denis Bourke's benefit.

In the meantime, Aunt Conyngham had rushed into voluble explanation, knowing that she must account to her niece for Mr Caruthers's appearance, else that wayward young lady might make him suffer for venturing to come.

"You see, my dear, I had to go to town, and when I got there I found those dreadful workpeople still in the house—such confusion! I had learned, Maurice, that we could sell that land of ours. I'm so bad at business letters, and I was dying for a peep at Georgia and you! Last evening Mr Caruthers was good-natured enough to pay me a visit, and I persuaded him to pioneer

me out. You know I can't travel alone, and my maid is worse than nobody, and Thomas had been indiscreet enough to fall ill."

"It was a very happy inspiration on your part," said Maurice, "and more than kind on that of Caruthers."

"Mrs Conyngham seemed to dread the solitary journey as much as if it were a pilgrimage to Mecca," rejoined that gentleman, with a glance half questioning, half apologetic towards Georgia.

"And so you sacrificed yourself," returned she; but though her voice was playful enough, Mr Caruthers feared that she was not too well pleased at his arrival.

"You had raved so over the region that I was anxious to see it," added Mrs Conyngham, secretly sharing Mr Caruthers's suspicion. "Anything finer than the road over the mountain I never saw."

Then she rendered the conversation general for a few moments; caused Phillis and Bourke to talk, and gratified both niece and nephew by treating their friends to her sunniest smiles and most honeyed words.

Presently Georgia inquired,—

"Where are you stopping, aunt?"

"At the Wachuset House, the hotel just on the edge of the town—very comfortable it seems,

too. We got in a little after one, dined early, and when I had rested, drove out to find you."

"Then, since you have dined," said Phillis, "I may venture to ask you both to share our nondescript evening meal; I don't know what name to give it; eh, Georgia?"

"It is sure to be uncommonly good whatever one you choose," said Maurice, smiling at her.

"Now, for that flattering speech you and Mr Bourke shall be allowed to stop too," said Phillis.

Aunt Conyngham heard and saw and took note of all these little evidences of familiar intercourse, but gave no sign. She treated Phillis to more sweet phrases, and expressed her pleasure at being invited to remain.

Presently Miss French disappeared to give orders to Ninny; and Georgia, seeing that grandma had come out into the porch, led the way thither, and the visitors were presented to the old lady, who looked as placid and sweet as usual, and received them with a quaint, old-fashioned grace, which both were discerning enough thoroughly to appreciate.

"What a picture she is," thought Aunt Conyngham, "and what a marvel of a girl! And this Denis Bourke, sprung from goodness knows where, an old friend of Maurice's, too! Hum!

I think my coming was a happy inspiration, indeed."

She exerted herself to be agreeable, and so did Mr Caruthers, who appeared especially inclined to regard Bourke with favourable eyes.

They had a charming supper; and when the moon rose, Aunt Conyngham declared that, much as she regretted the fact, it really was time for them to depart; so the horses upon which Sykes had, by Phillis's orders, bestowed bounteous hospitality were brought round. But before they came Aunt Conyngham said,—

"I suppose you could hardly get ready to go back with me to-night, Georgia, dear, could you?"

"Go back?"

"To the hotel—you'll stop there with me, there, won't you? Of course I took that for granted; I shall be so solitary else."

Georgia, who all the evening had been a little nervous, glanced towards Maurice for support. He nodded slightly. She knew that meant she was to hold her own.

"Oh, aunt, I really cannot change Phillis's delightful home for a crowded hotel!" she pleaded.

"She is my prisoner while she remains in these parts, Mrs Conyngham," added Phillis, coming to the rescue.

"A very willing one, I am sure," returned the elder lady; "but—"

"Oh, it is much better she should stop where she is, aunt," said Maurice pleasantly, yet with a certain authority in his tone.

"It would oblige me to pack twice," said Georgia, "and the idea of doing that would incline me to suicide."

"Besides," continued Maurice, "you would see nothing of her, for she would always be running off in search of Miss French; whereas if she stays here, she'll get over to see you daily."

Aunt Conyngham knew how to submit gracefully to the inevitable, sorely as she hated to yield her will in any matter, large or small, but in her thoughts she put the onus on Phillis French, and grew less well disposed than before towards that young woman, though she waxed more expansive and admiring, so far as smiles and words went. Everybody was deceived except Phillis herself. She instinctively felt that Mrs Conyngham's friendliness was a mere pretence, though she certainly only amused her.

"Georgia and I will drive over to see you in the morning, aunt," Maurice said.

"And do come early," Mrs Conyngham urged. "You and I must settle that tiresome business first of all."

"It won't take long, we will hope," sighed her lazy nephew.

"And when I am rested you must all show me the wonders of the region. You promise, Mr Bourke?"

"I shall be most happy to do my share."

"There must be any quantity of charming excursions to make," Mr Caruthers said to Georgia.

"Oh yes," she answered, with a lack of enthusiasm which was noticed by Aunt Conyngham, who observed quickly,—

"We must enjoy one or two, Georgia, and then you and I will talk about setting a day for our return to town."

"Yes," said Georgia again.

She knew that she ought to be glad of her aunt's opportune arrival. It seemed like an actual interposition of fate to save her from any perilous consequences of her own folly and weakness, but down in her heart she was not glad. Then, too, she regarded Mr Caruthers's coming in the light of a liberty, and managed, though very friendly and cordial, to let him perceive something of her sentiments, which roused in his mind a fear that he had blundered in yielding to Mrs Conyngham's proposal that they should surprise her niece and nephew by a visit, and dis-

cover the real motive which induced them to prolong their stay in such an out-of-the-way spot so many weeks beyond what appeared necessary or reasonable.

They all walked to the gate together, and stood there for a few moments engaged in uttering more gay and pleasant last words; but at length the adieus really ended, and the carriage drove off.

As soon as it was at a safe distance, and before either of the four had spoken, Phillis French sat down on a convenient bench, and began to laugh with all her might.

"Are you so daring as to flout my respected aunt?" demanded Maurice, joining in her merriment, as did Georgia and Bourke; for Phillis's silvery, ringing laugh was always irresistibly infectious.

"I am laughing at you," replied Phillis French, as soon as she could speak.

"Thanks," he said.

"And at Georgia," added Phillis.

"Well, I'm obliged also," cried her friend.

"Two runaway children," continued Phillis; "but Argus has come. Oh, my goodness, won't you pass a terrible hour to-morrow morning! But Argus is very charming, and so is stately Mr Caruthers. Oh, Georgia, can't you be good-

natured, and make arrangements for his falling in love with me?"

"He is safe enough to do it; you needn't trouble!" exclaimed Maurice, half smiling, half pouting.

Phillis French rose and thanked him by an elaborate curtsey.

"That is consoling," said she. "Do you really believe he is right, Denis Bourke?" she added, in an anxious voice.

"I hope so, with all my heart, returned Bourke.

As he spoke he gave Georgia a glance so full of meaning that she suddenly discovered the air had grown chilly, and that it was time to go in.

Phillis French unceremoniously ordered the two young men to leave her premises, and they departed sorely against their wills.

## CHAPTER VII.

IF the others slept no more than Georgia that night they were to be pitied, and though she tried to turn the hours to account by holding a serious communion with herself, it proved singularly unsatisfactory—worse, very painful.

The next morning she and Maurice fulfilled their promise of going over to Wachuset. It was characteristic of both that they only talked upon indifferent subjects during almost the whole drive, but when they were entering the town, Georgia said,—

"You will stand by me, Maurice, and not let Aunt Conyngham torment me quite out of my senses?"

"Indeed, she shall not! But you know in her heart she is afraid of you."

"I can't have scenes just now. If she should

choose the rôle of martyr it would be worse than scolding."

"She sha'n't worry you," said Maurice.

They left the conversation there, but Peyton comprehended that, for the present at least, Mr Caruthers's chance had dwindled to nothingness, and wondered how it would all end.

That gentleman himself was sitting in the verandah of the hotel as the carriage drove up, and he obtained a friendly greeting from Miss Grosvenor.

"Mrs Conyngham told me I was to convoy you to her sitting-room," he said, after the first salutations were over.

Georgia was glad to put off a *tête-à-tête* with her relative as long as possible, and so received his proposition very graciously. The three went upstairs, and Aunt Conyngham received her young relatives rapturously. They talked for a while, then she remarked with dignified playfulness,—

"Now, I am going to send you two men off to smoke. I've not had Georgia to myself a minute yet. After that, Maurice, you and I must settle our business, because I have promised to telegraph an answer to-morrow."

"Peyton, I suppose we must submit to be banished," said Mr Caruthers.

"If you go with a good grace, perhaps later, Georgia will take you to visit that waterfall she was raving over last night," rejoined Aunt Conyngham.

"That idea will give me courage, if Miss Grosvenor promises," he said, laughingly.

Of course Georgia was obliged to assent, but the thought of having to hold two troublesome interviews in succession rendered her both impatient and nervous.

As soon as the door closed on the pair, Aunt Conyngham exclaimed enthusiastically,—

"Upon my word, my dearest child, you are handsomer than ever, though you don't look as robust as I expected from your letters."

"I have not been quite well these last few days," Georgia answered.

Then it occurred to her that it might be an assistance in defending herself from her aunt's sharp eyes, to give a physical reason so good that no idea of any mental confusion or trouble would present itself to that lady. She began speaking of her adventure, though it was an effort.

"Maurice told me last night," Mrs Conyngham said, interrupting her at the first words. "We won't talk of it. Oh, my dear! But there, I needn't make a goose of myself and upset you!"

The tears were in her eyes, and she kissed Georgia heartily. "I assure you I felt like kissing Mr Bourke too," she continued. "He seems such a nice fellow—one of *the* Bourkes, Maurice tells me. Not handsome, you know, but intelligent, good manners; not like an American—no style. Ah, my dear, after all, when our countrymen are well bred, they have no equals for ease and elegance; you must admit that."

Georgia knew what this meant. Once when Mrs Conyngham had wished her niece to marry a titled Englishman, the sons of Albion had been the theme of her admiration. On another occasion a Spaniard of "high degree" was the aspirant, and the men of the Latin races roused her to enthusiasm. At present the males of Columbia had their turn. Of course the praise couched in general terms being meant to apply to Mr Caruthers.

"You must admit that, Georgia," repeated Aunt Conyngham.

"Oh, I daresay," returned Georgia, though less enthusiastically than pleased her relative.

"Maurice told me all about his friend," she continued. "My love, the man must be a little mad, you know. Why, by this time an American, under similar circumstances, would

have made a fortune—gone in politics—be on the high road, far on too, to everything heart could wish ; and here Mr Bourke lives in this out-of-the-way spot a common farmer, quite content, also—"

"Scarcely a common farmer," said Georgia.

"A lack of energy, no doubt," pursued Aunt Conyngham. "Irishmen are always indolent—always improvident."

"Don't forget that my father was part Irish," said Georgia, laughing.

"Oh, an admixture of the blood is not a bad thing ; but a genuine Paddy, my dear, they're all alike."

Georgia showed no inclination to do battle for the men of the Emerald Isle, and indeed Mrs Conyngham had not indulged in her diatribe from any fear that her niece had the slightest weakness for the special specimen under consideration. She thought she knew too well the girl whom she had brought up, to believe her capable of such insanity ; but it was the lady's habit when she praised one person to find some other whom she could blame or speak slightingly of—perhaps in order to keep an even balance of mind."

"Miss French seems a charming girl," said Aunt Conyngham.

"The cleverest, the most delightful in every

way that I ever knew," replied Georgia, and her voice was enthusiastic enough now.

"I hope she will not take Maurice's nonsense seriously. He always flirts with every pretty girl he comes near."

"She is a good deal more than a match for Maurice," said Georgia, "and the truth is, he is in raptures over her."

Georgia knew this was malicious, but she felt that she should perhaps spare herself a little if she set Aunt Conyngham to watch her brother, and he would not care.

"He has been so over scores and scores of women," cried the elder lady. "But she—"

"Cares nothing about him."

"Oh!" said Aunt Conyngham, in a tone of relief, "I suppose she will end by marrying the Irishman."

"That would seem a very natural conclusion," Georgia answered, with praiseworthy composure.

She began to think that now her aunt would get round to Mr Caruthers; but no, she talked of Newport, of the visits she had paid since leaving there, mutual friends, late fashions, new books, and was as entertaining and agreeable as possible.

At last she said,—

"Now I must send you away. Maurice and

I have got to make up our minds about those houses. Will you be amiable and amuse Mr Caruthers for a while?"

"Of course," said Georgia.

"It was so very kind of him to come with me! That stupid Thomas — to fall ill just now; you know I can't undertake a journey alone, and Rosalie is an incumbrance instead of a help—can't even learn to buy a railway ticket."

"She exhausted her talents in learning to dress hair."

"Oh, there she is an angel!" cried Aunt Conyngham. "Just ring the bell, dear, and have somebody find those tiresome men."

"They are coming," Georgia said; "I hear Maurice's voice in the hall."

"Punctual for once, Maurice," said Aunt Conyngham, as the two gentlemen entered; "but it is thanks to Mr Caruthers, I know."

"That is the way my relatives always receive any attempt on my part at practising the virtues," Maurice declared; "the only wonder is that I have the grandeur of soul to keep on trying."

"Oh! oh! oh!" groaned the trio of listeners.

"Envy, malice, and all the rest of it!" cried Maurice. "Take yourself off, Georgia Grosvenor, and carry Caruthers with you—but mind we have to be back by noon."

"You are going to spend the day here? I fully expected it," said Mrs Conyngham.

"Impossible! Forty things to do," vowed Maurice.

"But, Georgia—"

"Must go with me—she's got to write my letters," Maurice averred with bland persistency, and received a very grateful glance from his sister. "But we will ride over towards evening, and bring Bourke and Miss French. By the way, Bourke has organised an expedition for to-morrow—you are all to dine with him after —he'll tell you about it this evening."

Aunt Conyngham saw that she must resign herself, so she did it with her usual grace; but Mr Caruthers could not hide a look of disappointment at hearing that he was only to possess Georgia's society for an hour.

"At least we shall have time to visit the waterfall, Miss Grosvenor?" he questioned, trying to speak cheerfully, in obedience to a glance from Mrs Conyngham.

"Oh yes, it is not a long walk," she replied a little coldly, having with feminine quickness intercepted her aunt's warning.

As soon as the pair were safely out of hearing, Mrs Conyngham said eagerly,—

"Now, Maurice, do tell me—has Georgia

decided to accept Mr Caruthers, or is she going to be as mad as she has been in so many other cases?"

"I don't think she really knows herself," returned Maurice, with provoking indifference. "But I should say that his coming here was a false move—she has said nothing, but I can see she doesn't like it."

"Oh, I explained to her—she is quite satisfied! Your letters have been terribly unsatisfactory. I do hope you have done all you could to persuade her to behave sensibly."

"My dear aunt, I will neither make nor mar in the matter—I told you so when I first got back," said Maurice. "If Georgia thinks she can be happy with Caruthers, well and good—if not, she must send him adrift, as she has done her other swains."

"But she can't keep on doing that! Why, soon, she will no longer be very young. If her health stays delicate, she will go off dreadfully in her looks, and then—"

Aunt Conyngham held up her hands in despair of expressing in words what would be the consequences.

"She never was so handsome as now," said Peyton, "so you need not be worried just yet."

"That is true! But oh, Maurice, it would be

awful for her to reject him! Only think—so rich—so clever!"

"But if she doesn't love him?"

"Oh, if you have grown romantic, I've no more to say!" cried Aunt Conyngham scornfully "It is a new phase in you, certainly."

"Country air has caused it, no doubt," replied Maurice teasingly.

His aunt longed to sneer and hint something in regard to Phillis, but did not venture, having too wholesome an awe of Maurice's temper to venture on liberties with him. So she contented herself with deserting raillery for higher grounds, and said in a tone of lofty morality,—

"Marriage is too serious a subject to be contemplated by the light of youthful dreams and fancies—I trust Georgia's bringing up has taught her that."

Aunt Conyngham deemed it right and fitting to love one's husband—the Bible bade a woman do so; for, like many people, she could always find texts in that mysterious volume to support her views upon any and every subject. But for a girl to fall in love in advance of marriage, she considered positively indelicate; to refuse an alliance for lack of it, madness, to say the least. It was her creed that if a woman made a good match—she did not regard wealth and position

enough by themselves; the man must be personally worthy—then affection grew after the union—came naturally as children did, and if a woman was not happy, the fault must be her own.

She had been attached to her husband in a decorous fashion—had enjoyed her beauty and social success—but no man had ever caused her so much as the quickening of a pulse. Even the exciting happiness of maternity had been denied her, but, unlike most women, she had never regretted the lack. Her existence had been smooth as a well-kept lawn—no weeds of fancy—no brambles of fancy allowed there; everything was kept flat under the iron roller of settled opinion, and the monotonous expanse appeared to her the perfection of a human life.

Rumour had hinted that her husband used to find compensation elsewhere for the chilly atmosphere of his home—sought gardens where the plants were not so carefully trained, and the tendrils of the vines occasionally strayed away from the sticks of routine to which destiny had tied them. But in outward seeming he was all his wife could desire, and it is doubtful if she had known rumour was correct, whether she would have been deeply hurt or shocked, so long as appearances were kept up.

She believed firmly that Providence—like many Christians, she put everything on the shoulders of Providence—had made one rule for men and another for women. She regarded the foibles, what a few people in the world call sins, of young men as unavoidable. They must run a certain career of wildness; it was a mark of aristocratic birth so to do; must have mistresses and incur debts; so long as they only went far enough to gain an interesting reputation, she could see nothing in their conduct which demanded reprehension.

She proceeded to enlarge upon her favourite theme—woman's duty where marriage was concerned; but Maurice would not be serious, so she dropped gracefully down to his level and said,—

"You only laugh at me, and I want advice. You have been with Georgia now for several weeks, and can tell me what it is best to do."

"Do nothing," returned Maurice. "The weather is lovely; stop here quietly for ten days or a fortnight, and let Caruthers stop too. He could not have so good a chance elsewhere. He can see her constantly."

"If she will let him stay."

"She will; I can help you there! Now, be a

good aunt and don't fidget. You know, after all, fate must settle matters."

"Don't use such a heathenish word!" cried she, thinking herself shocked thereat, though in reality she was irritated, because she could not control that stern arbiter. She could not control Maurice either, and perceiving that, for some reason, or more probably caprice, he meant to keep Georgia still in the country, there was nothing for her but to remain also, so she expressed her readiness.

"Then that is decided," said Maurice. "Now about the business! I shall not understand, but I am quite ready to do whatever you like; and by the way, Georgia owns a share in those houses, so the sale will put a few thousand dollars in her pocket."

Mrs Conyngham entered into explanations with equal clearness and amiability, and the interview proceeded in the most satisfactory manner.

In the meantime, Georgia and Mr Caruthers had walked through the town, and found their way to the waterfall. In the beginning, Georgia felt as much troubled as she had when left alone with her aunt, but to her astonishment and relief Mr Caruthers maintained a reticence upon certain subjects which seemed modelled on her relative's

behaviour. He acted as any intimate male friend might have done ; talked agreeably, and having expended a reasonable amount of admiration upon the cascade and the scenery in general, he spoke of his own plans, and without absolutely asking it, showed a desire to hear her opinion, but not in the least as if she could have any personal interest in his decisions.

It was only when they were close to the hotel again that he said,—

"I hope you were not sorry to see me, Miss Grosvenor ? I had a few idle days, and I really could not refuse your aunt's request to accompany her. She seemed to dread the jaunt with nobody but her maid, as much as if it had been a journey across the Rocky Mountains."

"Indeed, it was very kind of you," Georgia answered. "Aunt Conyngham has a horror of travelling alone. I only hope you will not be bored by stopping here a day or two."

"Not likely," he said with a smile ; then added, "I am very fond of the country and mountain scenery, though I am a fusty, dusty, man of law."

The commencement of his sentence, and his smile, had fluttered Georgia anew, but its close enabled her to answer gaily, and rally him upon his choice of adjectives.

"You have not said you were glad to see me," he observed, as they reached the hotel verandah.

"One is always glad to see one's friends," she replied, "and you and I are old and good friends."

In her heart she was not glad, but she hoped that her words might give him a warning of what he had to expect if he began to speak of any change in those friendly relations. He gave no sign of having understood, however.

Just then Mrs Conyngham and Maurice came through the hall.

"Here you are," said the latter; "I was going to look for you. Caruthers, I have persuaded my aunt to stop ten days—of course, you can't desert her."

"Oh!" exclaimed Georgia, frightened at the idea of being kept longer within Bourke's reach, "why, I thought we were going back at once."

"Nonsense!" said Maurice. "It's all settled; don't make difficulties, Miss Puss! You'll stop, Caruthers?"

That gentleman glanced at Miss Grosvenor before replying. If she must remain, his presence would be a safeguard; and yet, if she urged him to stay, it would seem an encouragement; Maurice helped her out of her dilemma.

"We will just be lazy and idle together, and

forget there is a single serious consideration in the world," he said. "The first person who is guilty of having a thought shall be fined heavily."

"Oh, then we may have a pleasant week," said Georgia, and now she smiled at Mr Caruthers.

"And if you all agree to let me stop, I shall be delighted," added that gentleman.

"Of course you must," Mrs Conyngham said; "I can't be left cavalierless in these wilds! I wanted Georgia to come here, but Maurice always will have his own way! I suppose the truth is, he thinks he can't visit that pretty Miss French quite so freely if his sister is gone."

"Oh, feminine Daniel!" cried her nephew, who had explained to his aunt that, if she insisted on Georgia's company, that young lady would at once turn rusty from a fear the insistence arose out of a desire to afford Caruthers better opportunities of seeing her alone.

After a little more conversation, Georgia and Maurice took their departure.

"Well?" Mr Caruthers asked, turning towards Mrs Conyngham, after watching the carriage till it disappeared.

"Patience!" she answered. "I know nothing yet; but at least you will admit that my bringing you here was a good move."

"I hope so," he said; "yes, I think so."

Mrs Conyngham was a very charming companion, and they passed a pleasant day; among other things, going to visit some acquaintances who had arrived at one of the hotels on the preceding night, and meant also to linger for a little in the beautiful region.

The brother and sister came back at the appointed hour, accompanied by Phillis and Bourke, but the party drove over. Georgia had no mind to expose herself to a horseback ride with Denis, so she declared that she had promised her aunt to spend the evening, and it would be out of the question for her and Phillis to sit so long in their habits.

Denis behaved with great discretion; Aunt Conyngham became satisfied that her first suspicion must have been an error. The young man had not fallen in love with Georgia! No doubt he would end by marrying Phillis French. That would dispose of them both; and thinking this, Aunt Conyngham was prepared to be very amiable to the pair, and enjoyed Phillis's witty sallies, and appreciated her loveliness, as she might not have been able to do, had her convictions taken another turn.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE next day proved as beautiful as ever an American autumn could produce, and the expedition which Bourke had planned was a complete success.

Mrs Conyngham's acquaintances, the Thirstanes and their friends, had come into the hotel on the previous evening, and been asked to join the party, but as their number made an addition of eight, Mrs Conyngham thoughtfully vetoed Bourke's idea of asking them to dine. They would all go to his house on their return, and partake of a high tea in his garden, always the most enjoyable of meals she declared, and the feminine portion of her listeners agreed with her. Maurice's information concerning his host's claret consoling the men for dispensing with a regular dinner.

Most of the young people went on horseback,

but Georgia had offered her steed to the oldest Miss Thirstane, and placed herself decorously in the carriage with the mother, when the party reached the Nest. Mr Caruthers was driving Aunt Conyngham in a pony phaeton, and that lady would have liked to give Georgia over to his care, but Miss Grosvenor artfully circumvented the plan. Just as they were ready to start, up came Denis and begged for a seat which was vacant; he had given his horse to one of the men. Georgia felt half vexed, half amused at this new and unexpected display of strategic ability on his part, but he did not appear to notice, and devoted himself to the elder ladies, who having already learned that he belonged to "*The* Bourkes," were prepared to find him charming.

Everybody was delighted with Phillis, and as Aunt Conyngham had spoken of her as Georgia's friend, the Thirstane party took it for granted that Miss Grosvenor was visiting her, and so did not occupy themselves about her social status, though had the mischievous girl been aware of their error, she would undoubtedly have insisted upon her profession of boarding-house keeper, with a cheerful assurance calculated to make Aunt Conyngham's blood run cold.

Maurice devoted himself to her with an open

assiduity which ought, according to novel writers, to have roused a rancorous hate in the hearts of the other young ladies, but the Thirstane girls and their companions knew that Maurice Peyton was as far beyond the reach of their spells as an inhabitant of another planet, so they wisely contented themselves with the attentions of the remaining gentlemen, and, contrary to the laws laid down in romances, quite fell in love with the sparkling creature, and envied Georgia her friendship much more than they envied Phillis her power with Maurice.

"Do you know what I overheard Mrs Thirstane say about me?" Peyton asked Phillis.

"Something unpleasant, I hope, since you were shabby enough to listen," retorted she.

"I didn't listen—I only heard."

"The distinction is worthy of you. Well, what did she say?"

"'Maurice Peyton, I really believe, is caught at last!' You needn't fly out at me, you know. I am only repeating what she said."

"I am sure I don't know why I should."

"Oh, I had not finished. 'That bewitching Miss French has captured him.' What do you say to that?"

"I am much obliged to her for the pretty adjective," replied Phillis, "but you can tell her

the capture, if it existed, would have been as involuntary as getting a burr attached to my gown."

"Well, I owe you thanks, certainly!" cried he. "Upon my word, I do think you are the most provoking girl I ever knew."

"I always like to merit superlatives."

"You merit; I mean if I were not a fool I should go away to-night and never speak to you again."

"Fancy me pining in a green and yellow melancholy! Come now, either show yourself agreeable, or let some other man take your place," she said. "Look back; isn't that lovely?"

"Yes," he answered, but with his eyes fastened on her.

They had wound for several miles up through a narrow mountain gorge overhung by great masses of rocks, crowned with vines and dwarfed pine trees. Now they emerged on a broad plateau, well wooded, from whence there was a magnificent panorama for miles and miles over the sweep of the two valleys shut in among the lofty peaks, which were purple and gold with the haze of the late afternoon.

Peyton helped Phillis to dismount, and tied their horses to a tree. The rest of the equestrians

rode up, and presently the carriages gained the summit. Everybody alighted and strolled about admiring the view. There was plenty of gay talk and laughter, and after a while the stone jugs of claret cup and lemonade, which Bourke had provided, were taken out of the ice-cold brook, and distributed along with delicious cakes of Mistress Tabitha's manufacture.

Just as Mr Caruthers perceived a favourable moment for placing himself beside Miss Grosvenor, who had hitherto been monopolised by some of the cavaliers belonging to the Thirstane party, the unfortunate gentleman was taken possession of by Phillis French, and so lost the chance he had eagerly awaited. Few of his sex would have considered themselves objects for commiseration, but Herbert Caruthers was one of those rare men who could only have eyes for one woman, and Miss French's witcheries were worse than wasted. Her detaining him laid in his mind the foundation of a dislike certain to grow rapidly, for he was a person who seldom changed his first impressions.

He thought her witty conversation fast, her manners coquettish, even her piquante loveliness did not appeal to him; and wicked Phillis, with her usual clear-sightedness, perceived the effect she was producing, and somewhat exaggerated

her ordinary style, not caring in the least what he thought about her, so long as she could keep him aloof from Georgia, who at all events would be grateful, she knew very well.

Maurice Peyton watched her manœuvres, and understanding their motive, hugely admired them, though under other circumstances jealousy would have prevented his so doing. He had ceased to think or wonder how it had come about. The fact was patent to his own mind that he really loved this changeable, inexplicable creature, and though his somewhat discursive past had brought him sensations enough in the way of passion and temporary caprices, he had never been in love till now.

He knew that he should have great difficulty in persuading Phillis of the depth and lasting nature of his feelings, but life had never yet brought him a disappointment, so he could not contemplate the possibility of anything in the world being refused upon which he had set his heart.

They waited to see the sunset colours brighten the hills, then set out on their return, in order to descend the mountain road before twilight gathered.

"Aren't you ashamed to go stealing my sister's young man?" Maurice asked, as he helped Phillis to mount.

"And he enjoyed it so," rejoined she, with one of her ringing laughs; "it was delightful to watch his face as he tried to hide his disgust under a ghastly smile. I have done for myself; if ever Georgia becomes Mrs Caruthers I shall not be allowed within her reach."

"It is all your own fault; serves you right, too, for meddling," said Maurice, gazing at her with eyes so full of passionate admiration that Phillis French proceeded to inflict punishment.

Before he could untie his horse she had ridden away with one of the other gentlemen, and he had to content himself with Miss Thirstane's society until they reached the den, and so might have been able to appreciate poor Mr Caruthers's disappointment, only that he was too busy thinking of his own.

Phillis had sent Ninny to assist Mistress Tabitha; and the united genius of the pair had concocted a repast which would have tempted an anchorite and satisfied the palate of the most fastidious gourmand. The old house looked as picturesque as possible; the table laid in the garden, and lighted by lamps hung among the trees, produced a very pretty effect; and, to Georgia's astonishment, Bourke seemed quite in his element playing host to a large party. For the first time it struck her that, under good

management, not only comfort, but a certain degree of luxury, could be attained without great wealth; for Bourke's entertainment could not have been a more complete success in a villa at Twickenham or Newport.

Mr Caruthers had succeeded in getting next her, and she prepared to be agreeable; but unfortunately, soon after they were seated, she called upon him to admire Phillis, who was the centre of attraction to all the new men, young and elderly, and as much at ease in her *rôle* as if she had passed a season in Vanity Fair, only with a certain originality which she would not then have possessed, and which proved one of her greatest charms in masculine eyes, even though it might afford feminine judges a peg whereon to hang a little adverse criticism.

But Mr Caruthers, with the memory of his recent wrongs prominent in his mind, could not admire Phillis French; and having no idea of the strength of Georgia's affection for her, he allowed this to be seen, and, what was worse, pronounced certain censures, which only displeased Miss Grosvenor the more because mingled with compliments to herself at Phillis's expense.

"The man is a good deal changed," thought ungrateful Georgia. "He is getting stiff—even a

little sententious; and, dear me, he certainly has grown old this summer."

She gave him a brief lecture on the folly of forming hasty judgments—to him, who prided himself on his coolness and deliberation! She added, that she liked Miss French better than any living woman, and meant to do so all her life, and to see a great deal of her too, and only wished she had the ability successfully to model her own manners upon those of her friend. Of course, the reproof caused Mr Caruthers to regard Phillis French with increased disfavour. He felt hurt, too, that Georgia should treat his opinion so cavalierly, and altogether the supper did not prove half so pleasant as he expected when he sat down at table.

Georgia had meant that the carriage should deposit Phillis and her at home; but Bourke prevented this by indicating another route for the party's return, which would shorten the distance; and as most of the ladies were tired, his advice was accepted.

Georgia could not avoid walking back with Bourke beside her; but she hoped at least to keep Phillis and her brother near, and did her best to render the conversation general. She succeeded in her design until they reached the brow of the hill; then Phillis and Maurice laid

wagers as to which of them would first get to the foot; and in spite of Georgia's remonstrances, couched under a fear that Phillis French would fatigue herself, they set off, laughing like a couple of children just let loose from school.

They had chosen the high road because too dark to take the path through the wood; so there was a long walk before them, and Georgia knew that, ten to one, the vexatious pair would not come within earshot again.

"So foolish of Phillis!" she said; "and she makes Maurice behave as much like a child as herself."

"Oh, the run won't hurt her," Bourke answered, with a cheerfulness which exasperated his listener, because it showed that he regarded the escapade as a special interposition in his favour. "P. French is as strong as one of our little mountain ponies."

"She will overtask her strength some day," Georgia said; "she is never quiet."

"All our new people seemed charmed with her," Bourke observed.

"As if anybody could be anything else; I never saw a creature so bewitching or so tantalising," cried Georgia, ready to dwell upon Phillis French's perfections to an unlimited extent.

Just now a selfish motive mingled with her

enthusiasm for her friend; she was glad to snatch at any subject which would keep the *tête-à-tête* on safe ground.

Bourke assented; then he asked,—

"So my farmer's entertainment was a tolerable success?"

"As I told you, they were all delighted."

"I was a little nervous at first," he said, laughing; "I was afraid you would think me awkward."

"Nonsense!" said Georgia,—then added, "I beg your pardon. I believe Phil and Maurice are infecting me with their careless ways."

"I don't think you need feel it necessary to be ceremonious with me," he answered. "I hope at least we have got beyond the frozen regions of mere acquaintance."

His voice was grave enough now, and Georgia did not speak.

"Have we not?" he persisted.

"A long while since," she replied.

Somehow this man irresistibly impelled her to tell the exact truth, even against her will.

"And a great way beyond, since I have told you that I loved you, and you have admitted that you care a little for me," he said, in the low, soft tone his voice took in moments of deep feeling.

Georgia withdrew her hand from his arm.

"What is that for?" he inquired.

"Because—because you are ungenerous," she said, somewhat unsteadily. "You promised me not to talk in that way again."

"Oh, Georgia Grosvenor."

"Well, I asked you not, and I took it for granted that you promised."

"Hardly, I should think! Our conversation ended very abruptly."

"But there was nothing more to say," she interrupted.

"You must not call me ungenerous because I take any opportunity I can get," he went on, regardless of her sentence. "You see I have my own battle to fight, and you would be the first to despise me if I did not fight with all my strength."

"There must be some object in doing so to make fighting meritorious. There is none here," she said firmly.

"Please take my arm again; the hill is very steep," he said. "If you were to hit your foot against a rolling stone you might fall."

She was going to refuse—to say that it was light enough for her to see; but just then she fulfilled his warning and stumbled, so could not object when he placed her hand in his arm.

"No object!" he continued. "I am fighting for my happiness!"

"What you mean would not be for your happiness," she answered.

"I don't think I understand."

"Then I must make you," she replied, but animated by a sort of desperation rather than courage.

"You have been thinking it all over then," he said. "I hoped you would—I am so glad you have!"

"Of course I have thought—could I help it, after—after—"

"After I had told you I loved you—after you had admitted that you cared," he said.

"I don't know what I admitted; you frightened me. It is not fair to remind me; I did not mean to say it."

"Oh, Georgia, who is ungenerous now?"

"Yes, I am — worse than that — cowardly! This is what I must say, then. Consider the admission I made unsaid; it can never have any sequence any more than if it had possessed no meaning—you understand?"

"That you were mistaken?"

"Oh, how can you torment me? Then I must speak out—"

"Yes; nothing must be left untold."

"The idea of my marrying you would be as insane as for me to jump into the lake down yonder. There—I hope that is clear enough!" she cried almost fiercely, while a hot pain shot through her heart as she uttered the words.

"It is not in the least clear," he said. "It would be if you did not care for me; but since you do—"

"What good is there in my caring?"

"If it makes you and me happy."

"It could only make us both unhappy—I have told you so," she said. "Wait—let me finish. Perhaps it will sound hard, but I am hard—and worldly—to the very core—I have told you that too."

"Oh, yes; you have told me that!"

"And it is true. So, now, what could you offer me—what would you do with me or for me if—if—"

"If you consented to be my wife?"

"Would you expect me to live in your old farm-house—buried alive, feeding the chickens, superintending the garden? You must see how absurd that idea is; you know how I have been brought up. You know my expensive habits—my craving for excitement; yes, more than that, you know that I am ambitious. I want a high place in the world—influence, position—I—oh,

you know all these things! Don't make me feel how hard I am by forcing me to hear myself say them."

"Then you admit there are women who could give up all these advantages for love?" he asked.

"Yes, and I envy them; but, mind you, all the same, I think they are mad!" she exclaimed.

"Wait a moment; let us look at your first speech a little."

"It's no good trying to tear it to pieces."

Again he went on, regardless of her interruption,—

"That high place in the world which you want—do you think it would be very soft, very sunny, shared with a husband whom you did not love?"

"I never have believed in love—at least, for myself."

"But now, Georgia—now!"

She did not speak, but he felt her hand tremble on his arm.

"With any feeling in your heart for one man, could you accept that position you speak of from another?"

"No; but I told you I did not mean to go on caring."

"You can't help it? Hearts won't go out and come back at bidding."

"I don't believe I have much heart. You can see my regard for you cannot be very deep, since I am not prepared to attempt any sacrifice—not even the slightest—for your sake."

He stopped short and confronted her in the dim uncertain light.

"Georgia," he said, "I would not marry you while you had any feeling that you made a sacrifice."

"Certainly, the life you could offer me would involve a very, very great one!"

"That is because the way I look at it is new to you. If your regard grows, your views will change."

"Never enough to persuade me that a life of obscurity is worth living!" she said passionately, fighting against something in her own breast all the while. "If you talked to me of making a career for yourself—a fortune—winning fame and honours—if you promised those things in the future, it would be different."

"I have my career," he answered; "circumstances might widen, but nothing could alter it."

"Oh, I have heard over and over all your philanthropic plans—your general brotherhood ideas," she said impatiently, though it seemed to

her that she was impatient with herself—not him. "They are fine—noble—but utterly impossible. Instead of leading to fortune and position, they will lead to wasting money and becoming a jest—a failure."

"If I were to have millions left me to-morrow, I should only begin to carry out my ideas on a larger scale," he said calmly.

"Then why think of—of liking a woman who can no more sympathise with such opinions than a marble statue could?" demanded she.

"I should not," he answered. "But in your soul you do sympathise with them; you do know them worth living for—yes, dying for, if that became necessary!"

"I assure you, the human being never existed so little capable of any approach to heroism as I," she said.

"And I assure you that you are capable of a great deal. You don't know yourself. You have lived a false life—been nurtured on false principles; you have despised and hated them—girded against the emptiness of existence—tried to believe you had no heart! My dear child, the man, be it I or another, who teaches you that you have one, will show you too that you are capable of accepting any existence, great or lowly, in which that heart can live and expand

freely, which can offer the only personal good worth possessing—happiness."

"I never knew a happy person. I don't suppose I have a right to expect an exception in my favour."

"Ah," he said, "now it is not your real self who is talking—it is the Miss Grosvenor that your little society world knows."

"That is my real self—at least it must grow to be," she cried.

He waited an instant; then he asked,—

"Don't you feel ashamed?"

"Yes," she replied, with a sob; but she hardened her voice, and added, "it is true, though. There—you can see what I am. Be satisfied—go your way and let me go mine. You can at least have the comfort of despising me; and that will help you to forget."

"I believe if ever man and woman met whose way was meant to be the same, you and I are the two," he said.

"You drive me quite frantic!" cried she. "What is the use of such talk? Let us be friends. Be sorry for my vacuity if you like, but don't try to think me a grand character, or able to become one."

At this moment, to Georgia's intense relief,

Maurice's voice rang through the still air, bidding them come on."

"I did not know we were so near the house," Bourke said. But he held her back when she would have hurried forward. "Have you told Mr Caruthers that you cannot marry him?" he asked.

The utter unexpectedness of the question fairly took her breath away. She tried to be angry at his presumption in asking it, but it was useless; he kept her hand fast, and would so keep it, she knew, until she answered.

"No," she said meekly.

"Then you ought," returned he; "it is not fair to leave him in suspense, now that you are clear in your own mind."

Georgia remained speechless. The oddest thing to her was that he dared speak like that, and that she could let him!

A few steps more brought them to the gate, where Phillis French and Maurice were standing.

## CHAPTER IX.

BESIDES the pleasure of his holiday, Mr Caruthers had found a little occupation which helped to pass a portion of the hours when he could not have Georgia's society. Several years before, he had taken a tract of mountain land in this region in payment of a bad debt, and he chanced to mention the fact to Bourke. It adjoined some coal property wherein Denis held a small share, and which the new facilities offered by neighbouring railways had decided the company to develop. Mr Caruthers learned that the possession he had always regarded as valueless had become an object of interest to the company; and when Bourke informed the directors that the owner of the tract was stopping at Wachuset, they entered into negotiations for its purchase.

Denis saw a good deal of Mr Caruthers; that

gentleman displayed much interest in his projects, though he could not conceal his opinion that the young man was a visionary, and would soon find himself obliged to renounce his schemes as a complete failure. But he admired Bourke's energy and enthusiasm, and was never weary of seeking his society. The peculiarity of the situation often caused Denis secretly to smile, and he wondered if Mr Caruthers's liking would survive the fact of discovering that he had a rival in his new acquaintance.

Ten days had elapsed, but Georgia Grosvenor still carried upon her conscience the burthen of the confession she must make. Bourke's warning that it was unfair to keep her admirer in suspense, now she had come to a decision, troubled her with a sensation like guilt, though in reality there had been no opportunity for her to speak. Some plan of amusement was constantly on foot, and, frequently as she met Mr Caruthers, they had slight chance to hold private conversations. There had been no further *tête-à-têtes* between Denis and herself; she had taken pains to avoid such—with considerable difficulty, however, owing to his habit of appearing unceremoniously at the Nest.

Maurice was good and kind; but when Georgia tried in a roundabout fashion to im-

part something of her troubles and perplexities, he stopped her, saying,—

"My dear, if you asked for advice, I should not know what to answer. If you were to confide in me you would regret it. You know how proud and reticent you are; sometime you might find it hard to forgive me."

She could not ask if he knew anything of what had passed between her and Bourke, much less try to discover if he suspected the most disturbing element in her thoughts. But his verdict was just; no human being could help. Maurice and Phillis, much as they loved her, were as powerless to aid as the merest acquaintance could have been. Phillis showed her sympathy in every way except words, and her companionship was a support and rest, though in all their evening talks no mention came up either of Mr Caruthers or Bourke, save in an ordinary friendly fashion.

Georgia felt that she could not much longer go on as she was doing; the strain told upon her nerves, and brought back the sleeplessness, the loss of appetite, and sensations of fatigue and causeless apprehension, which had been the troublesome features of her illness in the spring.

She began to tell herself she had treated Mr Caruthers ungenerously; and, while recognising

the fear as an offspring of her morbid fancy, she could not avoid the pain it brought. Sometimes she sought to work herself into a passion against Denis Bourke. It was cruel of him to unsettle her, when his reason must assure him that he had no right to ask her to share an existence like his. Oh! if she had never seen him, she should have married Mr Caruthers — been contented in a chilly fashion, filling up the years with aims and employments suited to a woman of her tastes. Then Denis's words would recur, — there was another woman in her — the real self, whose aspirations had been stifled in the artificial round of her education, but still possessed vitality enough to develop and grow strong—able to hold lofty aims—to do, to be, to suffer, if necessary, but to live.

Was this true? She seemed entirely ignorant of her own character; certainly her present self looked a stranger; a few months previous, an angel from heaven could not have induced her to believe she should ever feel what she felt now.

Her mind appeared a hopeless chaos; further than a resolve to speak frankly with Mr Caruthers, and hasten beyond any possibility of contact with Denis Bourke, she could not reach. What she was to do with the coming years she could not tell. Oh, those years, how blank they

showed—how empty they would be when deprived of the brightness of her dream!

She was thinking of these matters one afternoon as she sat in the verandah with grandma and Phillis, the latter reading aloud. The old lady proved as usual an attentive listener, but Phillis French, glancing now and then at Georgia, perceived that her thoughts were wandering—knew, too, by the expression of her face, what dreary reflections troubled her.

Suddenly Peyton's merry laugh rang on the air; the three ladies looked up simultaneously, and saw Maurice and Mr Caruthers at the gate.

Georgia wondered how any mortal could laugh so gleefully, and the contrast of her brother's gaiety with her own gloom, so jarred upon her feelings, that she said almost fretfully,—

"One never can have an hour's quiet! I believe if one went to a desert island, some tiresome man would find means to intrude.

"Pretty sure, too, if you went, Georgia," replied Phillis, but her friend caught a quick glance of sympathy which afforded a certain comfort.

Miss French moved forward as the two gentlemen approached the steps. "You meant we should know you were coming, Mr Peyton!" she said. "If my opinion were asked, I should say it was very inelegant to laugh so heartily—

not at all my idea of the way, 'a scion of aristocracy,' as Mrs Thirstane calls you, 'ought to conduct himself.'"

"This is the person to blame," returned Maurice, pointing to his companion. "Don't oblige me to bear other people's sins."

"They would be a heavy load in addition to your own!" said Phillis. "Good-morning, Mr Caruthers. You hear that slander? It shows you what you must expect when you choose evil society."

Phillis French and her heedless speeches were still as much under that gentleman's ban as when she first ran counter to his prejudices, though he could not help admitting her grace and charm, and carefully restrained any expression of his disapproval even from Mrs Conyngham, lest in an unguarded moment she might tell Georgia thereof. Phillis French was not deceived by his scrupulous courtesy; she knew he had never forgiven her. On her side, she could not patiently contemplate the possibility of her friend's marrying him, and delighted in doing and saying things to waken his silent contemplation.

"Good-morning, Miss French," he said, lifting his hat with what she called his Grandisonian manner. "I trust your grandmother is well."

"Come a little further and she will speak for

herself; so will Miss Grosvenor, whom you do not ask after! We are not dangerous, though we are ill-regulated, especially Georgia, who has, I fear, greatly contaminated my relative. But you did not answer my question as to whether you are convinced of the harm that arises from associating with a Tray of bad character!"

"I must be, since Miss French insists," he replied politely, though he always grew a little stiff when subjected to her raillery.

He passed on, shook hands with grandma and Miss Grosvenor, and sat down between them. Phillis and Maurice stood leaning against the railing, and indulging in a few additional merrily sharp speeches of the kind Mr Caruthers disapproved.

"You have not told us what you said to make Maurice laugh so loudly," Georgia observed, in a mood to find conversation an effort.

"He doesn't dare!" cried Peyton. "I was laughing at his misery."

"Indeed, I was at a loss to understand why my news amused you so much," said Mr Caruthers, feeling warmly, as he liked Peyton, that the young man was very neglectful of the dignity of his elders.

"Then tell my sister, and see if she is amused," returned Maurice, exchanging a glance of satisfaction with Phillis French.

"I think I am too indolent to-day to be amused at anything," said Georgia.

"But not too lazy to be vexed," rejoined Maurice gaily.

Georgia saw her admirer looking at her with a certain expression of uneasiness, and said,—

"Mr Caruthers leaves that fraternal duty to you, Maurice ; he never says any but pleasant things."

Phillis French leaned over the balustrade, ostensibly to gather up some vine-tendrils which had strayed out of bounds ; in reality to have an opportunity to whisper to Peyton as he bent forward to assist.

"He will end by making G. G. as Grandisonian as himself. I foresee that we shall be obliged to bring his geometrical existence to a violent and premature close."

"Listen !" Maurice whispered back. "You'll see Georgia in a wax presently."

Then the absurd pair smothered their laughter, pulled the vines into place, and stood watching.

"What news did you give that silly boy ?" Georgia was asking.

"Oh—ah !" said Mr Caruthers. "Miss Grosvenor, your aunt and I had quite a surprise this morning. Mrs Mayford arrived, very unexpectedly to us both."

His voice and face were so deprecatory that Maurice laughed outright, and Phillis joined him, causing Mr Caruthers to cast a somewhat irritated glance in their direction.

Georgia had received his tidings in silence; he turned towards her again, and added with a haste very unlike his usual deliberate speech,—

"She had been visiting some friends in Wyoming Valley, and having heard from Mrs Conyngham that she was here— "

"And you," broke in Peyton.

"She stopped to spend a few days," continued Mr Caruthers, only noticing the interruption by a frown. "You may imagine what a surprise it was to us."

"A pleasant one, I am sure," said Georgia coldly, as his sentence died away unfinished. "My aunt's dear friend and your cousin must of course have been very welcome to you both."

"Dear me!" cried Phillis French uncharitably, eager to aid Maurice in persecuting the unhappy gentleman. "Have you a cousin, Mr Caruthers, and has she come to visit you? We must do all we can to make her stay agreeable."

"You are very good, Miss French," he replied. "Mrs Mayford and I are not rela-

tives, however—she is the widow of a second cousin of mine."

"Oh, that is the same as a relation of your own!" said Phillis, with what Mr Caruthers considered flippancy.

"Even nearer sometimes—eh, Caruthers?" added Maurice, and this speech the ill-used gentleman would have characterised as downright brutal, if he had spoken his thought.

"And a widow is always charming!" cried Phillis French. "And she is a great friend of yourself and the aunt, Georgia? Oh, do tell me all about her!"

"I am not good at description, Phil," said Georgia; "you will have to defer your curiosity until you see her."

Mr Caruthers took advantage of these words to give the rest of his news; his deprecatory tone and expression returning as he did so.

"Mrs Conyngham and she propose driving over a little later—Mrs Mayford is most anxious to see you, Miss Grosvenor."

"That is very amiable on her part," said Georgia, cruelly determined not to be softened by poor Mr Caruthers's humility.

"Of course she is young and pretty—aren't widows always, Mr Caruthers?" asked Phillis French.

Grandma had been a silent but observant spectator; she saw that Georgia was annoyed, Mr Caruthers troubled thereby, and Phillis and Peyton bent on worrying both, so she said,—

"My child, you must have tea ready—the ladies will be tired after their drive."

"Ah, dear madam, you are always kindness and thoughtfulness itself," said Mr Caruthers, turning towards the old lady with the deference and gentleness he always showed her; a consideration which formed his redeeming point in Phillis's eyes.

"Of course she is, Mr Caruthers—the result of my bringing up! Yes, yes, grandma, we will high tea them to the fullest extent of mine and Ninny's abilities! But you didn't answer my question, Georgia or Mr Caruthers—whoever I asked! Is Mrs Mayford young and pretty?"

"Rather pretty and rather young," said Georgia, smiling; she could never long resist Phillis's nonsense.

"I don't believe *rather young* is grammatical; now is it, Mr Caruthers?" cried Phillis.

"It isn't founded on fact either!" added Peyton.

"Why, Maurice, what a horrible speech!" expostulated Georgia.

"She's thirty-five, and we know it, though

she always talks as if she was our cotemporary," said Maurice. "She is rather pretty; she is deceitful, catty, and abuses you and me like pickpockets behind our backs! Caruthers knows it as well as we, and he knows there's no love lost between us, so why make a mystery of your sentiments!"

"Certainly, my dear fellow, you have spoken clearly enough," rejoined Mr Caruthers, with a constrained smile. He had no objection to hearing his relative's widow abused, but he did not like it's being done before Miss French.

"You mustn't try to prejudice us against the lady in advance, Mr Peyton," said grandma gently, out of care for Mr Caruthers's feelings.

"Oh, discovering that she has discernment enough to appreciate Mr Peyton at his just value, could not have that effect," observed Phillis, turning quickly against her former ally.

"Because you know my worth too well!" said he.

"But I don't believe any human being could help loving Georgia," said Mrs Davis naïvely.

"Thanks, grandma!" said Georgia.

"Unless that human being were a widow—rather pretty and rather young!" cried Phillis French.

"I think Miss Grosvenor will admit that Maurice exaggerated somewhat," Mr Caruthers remarked, looking at her so contritely, that Georgia felt she could not be sufficiently ungenerous to punish him any further for what was no fault of his, especially as she knew well that Mrs Mayford was as distasteful to him as to herself.

"Phillis knows he always does, Mr Caruthers; she will receive his statement with due reservation," said Georgia, encouraging her unhappy devotee by a cordial smile.

"Indeed, G. G., I have always found Mr Peyton a model of truth," cried Phillis, again going over to her ally.

"And if Georgia and Caruthers don't stop abusing me, I'll tell something else," said Maurice, with a mischievous glance at the gentleman, under which he visibly suffered.

But Georgia was too thoroughly a woman to let anybody tease an admirer of hers beyond certain limits, and now she came to Mr Caruthers's rescue.

"Grandma, you have had no turn in the garden to-day," she said. "Suppose we go there and show Mr Caruthers our dahlias—we will leave this tiresome pair to bore each other."

The old lady complied; Mr Caruthers offered her his arm with alacrity, and led her down the steps.

"G. G. is beginning to pit herself against the widow," said Maurice, in a whisper, as his sister passed him in their wake.

"Oh!—now I understand!" answered Phillis French in the same tone.

"You are the most ridiculous couple of spoiled children that I ever saw," said Georgia aloud, laughing so pleasantly that Mr Caruthers glanced back with an increased air of relief. It lightened his spirits wonderfully to find that she did not mean to bear heavily upon him for the misfortune of Mrs Mayford's arrival.

When the three were out of hearing, Phillis said,—

"I see—I see! That widow has made a dead set at poor Mr Caruthers, and hates Georgia because she has stolen him."

"Precisely!" said Maurice. "It's lucky she doesn't know the real state of matters between them, else she'd poison Georgia as sure as fate. You ought to have seen his fright when he told me of her invasion! He pretended to have a message for Denis, but he only came to our house first, to get me to help break the news to G. G. of the intended visit! He let out that

the widow wanted to make him stop and drive over, but he escaped by promising to see them home."

"And is she really a great friend of your aunt's?"

"She was a ward of Mr Conyngham's, and used to live in their house—the aunt is attached to her from habit, and the widow knows how to flatter her very adroitly. Then she's sorry for her—old Mayford's relations managed to break the will, and she only got a very moderate share of the spoils, which was hard lines, as she married him for his money."

"Ugh!—served her right!" said Phillis.

"She's as plausible and deceitful as Old Nick," he continued. "She will rush into an intimacy with you if she can; you'll hear a nice lot about me!"

"I shall be too busy gaining her confidence in regard to her plans on poor Mr Caruthers to listen," said Phillis. "Now I must go and warn Ninny to prepare a feast. We will mollify her with hot biscuits, and soothe her with sweets, and she shall sit next her proposed victim at table—I foresee that I shall doat on the widow."

"Now, please, don't stop away an hour," pleaded Maurice, as she turned to go. "I want to tell you something."

"I will join you in the garden."

"No, no; I don't wish to hear Caruthers's prose."

"But I do," said Phillis. "He is very nice, though he doesn't like me."

"Nonsense! But never mind him!"

"No more than I do you," she replied, and disappeared indoors.

In the meantime the other three had entered the garden. Mr Caruthers complimented the old lady's dahlias to her satisfaction, and showed a becoming interest in her cheerful talk.

"I will sit down now," she said after a while, as they reached a rustic bench. "Georgia, my dear, perhaps Mr Caruthers will help you pick some of our beauties to give your aunt. Choose a quantity of those splendid crimson ones—Eastern Queens, Phillis calls them, though I fancy the name is her own invention."

"It is certainly very appropriate," said Mr Caruthers.

He gratefully seized the opportunity for a little private conversation with Miss Grosvenor, and grandma sat looking after them as they walked away, thinking how pleasant it was to have the society of all those charming young people, for to grandma even Mr Caruthers had hardly lost claims to youth. The patience with which she had borne the trials of former years

had borne blessed fruit; no cloud of doubt troubled her; whatever happened would be for the best, whether as regarded her darling Phillis or others. She could sit and smile at her own pretty fancies; listen to the songs of the late birds; enjoy the sunshine; her soul filled with serene quiet, and perhaps, though we who are restless with the possession of strength can hardly realise it, that boon granted to age is the highest blessing which reaches us in the whole round of human existence.

"What a picture the dear old lady makes!" Georgia said, glancing back at her as they paused by the dahlia-beds.

"Yes," Mr Caruthers answered a little absently, too full of her wish to acquire a certainty that he had not incurred Miss Grosvenor's displeasure, to bestow much thought on any other subject.

"I think we will have some of these golden marvels," Georgia observed, and he began to pick the blossoms she pointed out.

"I am so sorry for what has happened," he said. "It would have been bad taste on my part to say much before strangers, but I beg you to believe, Miss Grosvenor, that I would have saved you the annoyance of Mrs Mayford's visit if I could; but I never dreamed of her coming here."

"You could have done nothing if you had known, Mr Caruthers," Georgia replied. "And it certainly would be very unjust to blame you. Indeed, she will tease you more by the exactions of her friendship than she can me by her active dislike."

He sighed, remembering what he should have to endure, but only said,—

"She can hardly go so far as active dislike."

"Don't risk your character for sincerity by pretending to doubt it," returned Georgia, laughing. "She seldom takes any pains to hide her feelings towards me."

He could not deny this, and he knew, too, that in her girlish days Georgia had often suffered at the unscrupulous woman's hands by being misrepresented to her aunt, and annoyed in every possible manner, until old enough to teach her enemy that she had grown too strong for this line of conduct to continue. Personally, too, he had strong reasons for detesting his relative's widow. Though too thorough a gentleman to breathe it to any human being, and hating to admit it even to his own thoughts, because it seemed vain and petty, the relict's pursuit had been so open, in spite of her usual wariness, that it was useless to try to shut his eyes to the fact of her having stern matrimonial intentions in

regard to him, which failure had by no means caused her to relinquish.

"The truth is, she is envious of you," he said.

"Her reasons are as indifferent to me as her dislike itself," said Georgia. "We get on very well, now that she has learned it is not safe to pass certain limits! I suppose that speaks ill for my amiability; but then she is perfectly correct when she says I am not amiable."

"Oh, Miss Grosvenor!"

But Georgia did not want compliments which might pave the way to more serious subjects, for upon these there could be only one further discussion between them, at such time as she should find courage to tell him the truth. There was no opportunity now, Georgia reflected with a sensation of relief, even while her conscience pricked her for not having made it before.

"Look at those gorgeous purple flowers," she said. "Phillis calls them the Ladies-in-Waiting —the white are Maids of Honour. There is no end to her pretty fancies."

"Miss French is undoubtedly very clever," he replied.

"The cleverest girl I ever knew, and the best!" cried Georgia, so vehemently that Mr

Caruthers deemed it wise not to hint at a single exception.

"She is fortunate in her friend," he said; "you do not praise by halves."

"I hope you know that when I am one I am sincere," she answered.

"Indeed, I do," he said so earnestly that she remembered her words had offered a dangerous opening, and hastened to add,—

"I think we must not commit any further depredation, and grandma enjoys your visits so much, it is not fair to deprive her any longer of your society."

Mr Caruthers would gladly have lingered, and carried the conversation on to personal subjects, but he was always afraid of worrying Georgia; though, had he known female nature better, he would have been aware that too scrupulous a delicacy in using opportunities to plead his own cause never yet helped a man with any woman.

"I am so glad you are not annoyed," he said. "I assure you, Mrs Mayford seems in her most amiable mood."

"We must keep her amused; then she'll not tease us," Georgia answered, walking so determinedly forward, that he was obliged to yield all hope of prolonging the *tête-à-tête*.

"It would be hard indeed if anything hap-

pened to mar the brightness of these days," he observed.

Alas! they must soon be marred for him, was Georgia's bitter reflection, and the trouble must come through her! Again a swift pang of remorse smote her, as sharp as if the necessity had arisen from her own deliberate fault.

"See what an unfair advantage I have taken of your permission, grandma," she said, as they reached the bench. "I am quite ashamed."

"They will not be missed," the old lady replied. "You must make up two nosegays."

Mr Caruthers thought that few moments in his life had been so pleasant as this quiet half-hour, spent in watching Georgia's white fingers busy among the blossoms, listening to grandma's conversation, while the late afternoon sunshine cast its glow about, and a sense of peace seemed to pervade all exterior objects which found an echo in his breast, and Georgia herself gladly put by her recent troublesome reminders, and fastened her mind persistently upon the present.

Maurice was left so long to his solitude that he had time to smoke an entire cigar, while thinking that a chamelon could not be more changeable than Phillis French, though this very gift only kept him in a constant state of excite-

ment, which grew in intensity as the days taught him the depth and sincerity of his feelings.

Mrs Mayford likewise intruded herself upon his thoughts. He knew that his laughing assertion had been true ; there would be no limit to her aspersions, and he could never tell Phillis the real grounds of the woman's animosity. In his very youthful days she had tried to soften the tedium of her married life by flirting with him, and his indifference had too nearly approached scorn ever to gain forgiveness. He could only hope that Phillis's acuteness would lead her to think Mrs Mayford's extreme bitterness must spring out of personal feeling, and so pay no heed to her mixture of falsehoods and garbled truths. Then, too, he comforted himself by the reflection that for a woman to abuse a man to one of her own sex, and relate stories of his wildness and concomitant vagaries, usually had the effect of prejudicing the listener in the culprit's favour.

Maurice at length so completely lost patience, that, though aware it was ten to one Phillis French would punish him for doing it, he started in search of her. He met her in the hall, and she said, in a complacent tone,—

"Now, haven't I made my arrangements quickly ?"

"You have been gone an age."

"But when you see the result you will admit that the time was well spent. I shall win Mrs Mayford's heart. I am sure she likes good things; catty women always do."

"I think it rather hard I should be sacrificed to her ostrich stomach," he said complainingly, half in jest, half earnest. "At all events, now I can have you for a few moments to myself, and—"

"There comes the carriage!" interrupted Phillis French, with a malicious pretence of excited pleasure. "Oh, if they drive in and ruin the gravel, I shall hate them for ever! Run and meet them, if you have a heart in your bosom, and say there is not room to turn—say anything—only go!"

He knew he must obey, and off he went, followed by her mocking laugh, and reached the gate as the carriage drew up. Mrs Mayford received him with great affability, and he gratified her by a few adroit compliments. Grandma and her companion had joined Phillis before the three came up, and it was an exhilarating sight to watch the widow dart upon Georgia, crying,—

"Oh, you darling girl, how glad I am to see you! But you don't look so well as I expected;

but then, whatever style you adopt, pink or pale, is always becoming."

"Country air has certainly agreed with you, Mrs Mayford," said Georgia, releasing herself from the warm embrace. "Now, let me make you acquainted with my friend Mrs Davis, and her grand-daughter, Miss French."

Mrs Mayford was enthusiastic in her greetings, and, indeed, if an excessive affectation had not marred her manner, she would have been very agreeable when she desired to please. She paid the old lady and Phillis many neatly-turned compliments, and went into raptures over their home.

"I see you did not exaggerate in your description, cousin," she said to Mr Caruthers.

She always would bestow that name upon him; it afforded an appearance of intimacy which she was not the woman to neglect, though it annoyed him sorely, especially in Georgia's presence, as Phillis French's quick eyes discovered.

"Nobody ever accused Caruthers of that bad habit, I should think," said Maurice, looking towards Phillis to show that he shared her amusement at Mr Caruthers's unconcealed dislike of the familiar title bestowed with such sweetness upon him.

"Nobody ever accused my cousin of any, you very wicked Maurice!" cried the widow, shaking her finger at him.

"Cousin" in two consecutive sentences! It really was too much for Mr Caruthers's patience. He sat down by grandma, and began asking if she were tired, and left the others to talk among themselves for a few moments.

The widow devoted herself to Phillis, who studied her with interest, with her usual acuteness rapidly arriving at a clear estimate of her new acquaintance's character.

Georgia's description had portrayed her personal appearance with great exactness. She was rather pretty and rather young-looking. She was too thin, and the nose and chin were too sharp; the fair complexion had begun to grow slightly yellow, though as yet a faint *soupçon* of rouge in her cheeks was enough to make a contrast of colour which concealed the defect tolerably well; her eyes were good, and her smile very sweet but insincere, and the small white teeth were a little too pointed—they betrayed her relationship to the feline race. She had a soft, low voice, too, but in spite of her care in its modulation, there were certain tones which warned an acute observer that it could easily grow sharp, and take in every note in the gamut.

of unpleasantness, from fretfulness to downright snarling.

"Catty is very shrewd," thought Phillis French, "but the instincts will show. I am sure her coming will make sport."

Maurice noticed the two bunches of flowers which Mr Caruthers had deposited on a chair, and said,—

"Somebody has been robbing your garden, Miss French."

"Oh, Georgia is never to be trusted there," said Phillis, "and grandma is wickedly weak in regard to her thievish propensities."

"This time I am not the culprit," returned Georgia. "Mr Caruthers picked the dahlias—a delicate attention on his part towards Mrs Mayford and my aunt."

"Oh, what beauties!" exclaimed Mrs Mayford, rising to examine the bouquets. "Thanks, thanks, cousin!"

"I must not lay claim to undeserved merit," that gentleman replied; "the flowers were Mrs Davis's thought."

"How good of you!" said the widow, going towards her with a bouquet in each hand. "Did you ever see anything so perfect, cousin?"

"Very pretty in point of colour," he answered;

"but I don't care for autumn flowers—they are always scentless."

He had no intention of making an ill-natured speech, but it seemed so applicable that Maurice could not repress a smile. Unfortunately the lady turned just in time to catch it, and fully understood its meaning.

"The bunches are exactly alike, so we can't quarrel over them," she said.

"Do women need a reason in order to quarrel?" Maurice asked.

"Ah, you must not judge the sex by your victims in those very peculiar continental cities; must he, Miss French?" she cried gaily.

"Have his victims been numerous?" demanded Phillis, putting on a shocked and startled expression.

"Oh, I mustn't whisper secrets," laughed the widow. "Don't be frightened, Maurice; we'll not expose him; will we, Aunt Conyngham?"

She knew that the brother and sister disliked to hear her address their relative thus; so, in their presence she often recurred to the title which it had been her habit to use in her girlish days.

"He's a very good boy on the whole," said Mrs Conyngham.

"Oh, that's doubtful praise. Mr Peyton, I

would rather be exposed than condemned by doubtful praise," cried Phillis.

"I am resigned either way," he answered, amused that the widow, in her eagerness to be spiteful, should so quickly show her hand.

"Aren't we to have the pleasure of Denis Bourke's company, Mr Peyton?" asked grandma. "Phillis, we must send for him."

"He is certain to stray along presently, Mrs Davis," said Peyton. "I'll not have you think too much about him when I am here."

"Oh, isn't that the gentleman you spoke of, cousin?" asked Mrs Mayford. "One of *the* Bourkes turned Socialist?"

"My dear madam," cried he, in horror, "I never dreamed of using such a word! Mr Bourke has original but very admirable ideas in regard to social duties. I have seldom met a man who impressed me so favourably on short acquaintance."

"Oh, don't scold me. I didn't intend to say anything wrong, cousin. I don't even know what Socialist means; do you, Georgia?" she rejoined, with a girlish laugh.

"If it means anything that expresses Mr Bourke's theories and practice, it must be very noble," said Georgia quietly.

"I'm dying to see him," cried the widow.

"And does he really live here and work his own farm, Miss French?"

"Oh yes," Phillis replied; "he and I are both farmers."

"You! Oh, that is too delicious! But do you really amuse yourself by superintending your place?"

"Not exactly for amusement," said Phillis. "I do it to earn my living; but I like it."

"Oh, how nice! I wish I could earn money, and so get beyond being as poor as a church mouse," sighed Mrs Mayford. "But where did you and Georgia get acquainted? I went south before she left town, and didn't know in what direction she went to visit this summer."

"Phillis and I made acquaintance here," said Georgia; 'but we were friends at first sight, and mean to stay so."

"Georgia wanted a quiet nest, and I wanted a boarder," said Phillis.

"Oh, I didn't know—I beg pardon," faltered the widow, in pretended confusion, adding, in a reproachful tone to Mrs Conyngham, "you should have told me; I am afraid I seemed rude, Miss French."

"What a funny idea," laughed Phillis.

"I declare it is all positively Arcadian," cried Mrs Mayford, and hurried on to another sub-

ject, certain that at least she had vexed Georgia.

She wanted to see the garden ; Miss Grosvenor announced her intention of remaining with grandma, and Mr Caruthers wanted to stop also ; but the widow would not let him off.

Before the party returned to the house Bourke appeared, and had a few moments alone with Georgia and grandma. Presently they all went into tea, and Mrs Mayford allowed herself no further lapses from amiability. She was charming to Denis, and rendered it evident that she had conceived an affection for Phillis as deep as it was sudden. She went away with the suspicion that she should be able to torment the brother and sister through this pair, and the idea put her in high spirits.

## CHAPTER X.

THE next day Denis Bourke and Mr Caruthers departed to fulfil an engagement they had made to visit a coal-mine, some fourteen miles off, among the hills, in the society of several directors of the company; and late in the afternoon Georgia and Maurice drove over to see their aunt, having tried in vain to persuade Phillis French to join them.

"It is rather hard on that unfortunate lady never to see you without having me thrust in as a third," said Phillis.

"Why, you scarcely ever go with us," returned Georgia.

"Possibly your aunt might have a different opinion."

"But she will only be too delighted," urged Maurice.

"Of course I am sure of that, Mr Peyton,"

Phillis replied ; " no creature could be anything else. Many people cry for my society, just as the advertisements say children do for Mrs Winslow's soothing syrup. I'm as grateful to take as a cup of tea or any other beverage that is cheering, but not inebriating."

" I think one would be obliged to leave out the negative," said Peyton. " But remember you have to return the dear Mayford's visit. Now you will go with us, will you not ? "

" Yes ; I will not—so don't waste time. The fair widow must try and support life without seeing me to-day. It will be an effort, I know ; but it can't be helped. Give her my admiring compliments, and present my respectful duties and devotions to your aunt."

They found that lady depressed in spirits by a neuralgic attack ; alone, too, as Mrs Mayford had gone to dine with the Thirstanes—she never remained near anybody who was suffering, if she could help it. Mrs Conyngham begged Georgia to stop overnight, and, of course, she could not refuse. Maurice remained, and dined with them in the aunt's apartment ; but soon after eight o'clock he rose to depart.

" You must drive round by the Nest, and tell Phil I am not coming, else she will sit up for me," said Georgia.

"Of course," said Maurice.

"But that road is considerably longer," Mrs Conyngham observed. "You can send your boy Joe over to tell Miss French."

"Yes, I can do so," Maurice answered, so dryly, that Georgia smiled and Aunt Conyngham frowned.

"You are in a great hurry to run away," she said, in an injured tone; "I am sorry it bores you to spend an evening with your sister and myself."

"I should be sorry if it did," he replied; "but Miss French must be told that Georgia stops with you."

"Miss French is a most important and highly considered person," said Aunt Conyngham, with a not quite agreeable laugh.

"Very important in my eyes," returned Maurice.

"And she certainly ought to be highly considered by all my friends," added Georgia. "Her goodness to me; her kindness and care during those first weeks when I was ill and miserable, were beyond all possibility of thanking her for."

"My dear children, please don't both attack me, as if I had been slandering the young lady," cried Aunt Conyngham, getting back her good

humour. I think her charming and very kind-hearted, and at least I am constant in my likings, if too old to be enthusiastic. That is better than Maurice's way of going into spasms of admiration over a person this week, and forgetting that person's existence the next."

"Oh, what a dreadful calumniator is this aunt of mine!" cried Maurice, laughing.

"It is perfectly true—Georgia knows it—at least where young women are concerned," persisted Mrs Conyngham.

Maurice defended himself against the aspersion in which Georgia joined, and a good deal of gay bantering ensued, but when Peyton had taken leave of his relatives, and was driving towards the Nest, his conscience forced him to admit that the allegation in regard to his fickleness could have been supported by numerous proofs and examples.

But he knew this could never be the case in regard to Phillis French. Even in the early days of their acquaintance, he could not easily have broken the spell she cast over him, and he recognised now that he was bound by a chain riveted fast in the very core of his heart.

He loved the girl; the feeling was totally unlike the sentiment he had indulged towards any other of her sex; he loved her, and he

meant to marry her if she could ever be brought to grant him this happiness—ever be brought to care enough for him! But she had so completely humbled his vanity he did not venture to think that as yet she had gone beyond friendly liking, and he frankly acknowledged himself not half worthy her regard—but then no man was, or could be—and he loved her!

He found Joe Grimshaw at the gate of Phillis's house waiting to take the horse home, knowing from experience that Mr Peyton would stop at the Nest.

"Has Mr Bourke got back, Joe?" he asked.

"No, sir, and I don't believe he'll come now—there's been a thunderstorm up in the mountains."

"Why, Joe, where do you find any signs? The moon is as bright as day!"

"'Tis here," said Joe; "but jest you look at that heap o' clouds away off towards Blue Rock—they're up in that quarter, and I'll bet my eye teeth they've had a soaking afore now, unless they got to Hummins's tavern by eight o'clock."

"We will hope they did," said Maurice. "Don't sit up for me, Joe—tell Patrick to leave the kitchen-door open."

"All right, sir, good-night," responded Joe, as he jumped into the carriage and drove off, grinning to himself. "He's that sweet on her, is Mr Peyton," thought Joe, "that he's like a fly arter honey, but what Miss Phillis thinks, a jury of judges couldn't tell, and if he ever does ketch her, he'll have to dance as hard fur it as a wooden-legged man climbin' up a ladder!"

Peyton walked towards the house by no means dissatisfied with Joe's information, that he should not find Denis. To enjoy a monopoly of Phillis's society for the rest of the evening was a pleasure so great, that he had no sympathy to waste on the misfortune of his friend whereby this consummation had become a possibility.

"It really is a proof of the truth of the old proverb about the ill wind," thought Maurice, laughing from sheer high spirits. Then he fell to marvelling in which of her numberless moods he should find Phillis French; but it did not much matter, she was sure to be charming in any case, only if she happened to be a little subdued and serious, he would do his best to turn the mood in his own favour.

Then he hurried on up the path, eager to enter her presence. When he reached the porch,

he found the outer-door closed for a wonder, because the evenings were still so warm that it usually stood open till Phillis retired for the night. But he saw a light in the sitting-room; through the open window he could hear Mrs Davis's voice; she and Phillis were there together of course; however, it must be near the old lady's bedtime, and then he should have Phillis French all to himself.

He knocked; waited a moment; then tried the door; it was locked; heard grandma say,—

"That is Denis or Mr Peyton."

"And he means to enter, Grandma Davis, so you might as well have your inhospitable door opened," Maurice called laughingly.

Grandma laughed back in answer; Peyton hard steps in the hall—very likely Phillis French coming herself to admit him. A key was turned; a bolt drawn back; Maurice said gaily,—

"Bolts and bars are useless, Miss French! Aren't you ashamed to be proved cowardly? If it had been Georgia now—"

The sentence remained unfinished; the door had opened. Maurice perceived that he stood face to face with Miss Raines, holding up a candle, by the light of which she peered eagerly at him.

"Laud's sake alive, so it *is* you, Mr Peeton!"

she exclaimed. "What between Molly Maguireses and the newspapers, I'm allers suspectin' depredators and bugalurs, and I says to Miss Davis awhile ago, says I, 'That 'ere front door has got to be locked, fur Anne Raines ain't a goin' to let you risk bein' depredated and burgled while she's round the patch.'"

"Quite right! I hope you are well, Miss Raines?"

"I'm so's to be about without boostin," I thank you," replied the spinster. "Air you pooty chirpy yourself? I see you a-ridin' by my place yesterday, but I was up to my elbows in bread dough, so I couldn't arsk you 'How dy!' But step right in—do; Miss Davis she'll be proper glad to see you."

In spite of her invitation she kept her stand, talking volubly, and he began to grow impatient.

"I will go in now and see Mrs Davis,' he said, when she paused to take breath.

"Why, in course—step right along!" said the lath-and-plaster woman. "It's quite a treat, I'm sure! I says to Miss Phillis, 'You jist go; I'll sit with grandma and sleep here!' I'd jist happened up with some work I'd been a doin' fur her, when Miss Plummer's little boy come and said Mirandy was took so much wus 'twasn't no

ways likely she'd do more'n last till mornin', and she's been that sufferin' a body carn't help callin' it a marcy, though's it's hard to lose yer children anyhow; and Mirandy she's that fond o' Miss Phillis that nothin' else would satisfy her."

"Miss French is not at home?" broke in Maurice.

"And won't be till mornin'," said Miss Raines; "she'll watch with Mirandy, and if anybody can be a comfort Miss Phillis will; for whatever she undertakes she's a dabster at, and watchin' is gist second natur' to her, as you'd know if you'd had her by you, as I did when I was that bad with rheumatiz fever last year that I screeched like all possessed if anybody said boo to me."

Maurice managed to get past the old maid and entered the sitting-room, where he was received by grandma with her customary placid cheerfulness. Never in his life had Peyton felt so disappointed at what might be called a matter of slight moment,—he had counted so confidently on finding Phillis, that to lose the pleasure made it seem that he had lost some very important opportunity of helping on his cause.

But he sat down, and remained until the old lady's bedtime arrived, Miss Raines bestowing

her society upon them, and claiming a large share of the conversation. Indeed, she carried her complacency so far that when Peyton rose, saying,—

"I must not keep you up, Mrs Davis," the spinster exclaimed; 'oh law! don't go, Mr Peeton, ef you feel like settin' still! I never go to bed airly myself, and I want to heel off this stockin'. When I've set myself a stent, I do like to finish it, and I said to myself arter supper, 'Ann Raines,' says I, 'you'll heel that stockin' afore you sleep to-night,' and Ann, she's got to do it."

But Peyton declined the amiable invitation, and took his leave. When he reached home, Patrick, who was just closing the house, informed him that Mr Bourke had not returned. After the old man had retired, Maurice found himself too restless to sit down in solitude, and his feelings in regard to Denis's detention changed so completely that he experienced a slight sensation of injury, because his friend had chosen this night of all others to go off on an excursion with Mr Caruthers and be detained by a storm.

He walked down to the road, and stood looking out through the moonlight. The house to which Phillis had gone was about a mile beyond

Bourke's farm. Peyton knew it very well, for he had several times stopped there with Phillis and Georgia, and the little suffering child had conceived a great admiration for his handsome face and winning manners.

He strolled along the highway, not telling himself he meant to proceed as far as the house with the romantic purpose of staring at it simply because Phillis French sat within, but he knew such was his intention, though he tried to indulge in a dignified surprise when a turn in the road brought the dwelling in sight, then laughed at his folly in attempting to deceive his own perceptions, pleased to find he had youthful freshness enough left to undertake so Romeo-like an expedition.

Peyton noticed a light burning in one of the lower rooms, and knew that Phillis must be there with her charge. He could not go back without trying to obtain a glimpse of her, though he had no mind to risk her displeasure by making his presence known. But the sick child had fallen asleep, and Phillis was standing at the window, left open by Miranda's desire, as the oppression on her chest rendered breathing difficult.

The noise Peyton's feet made among the scattered chips as he passed the wood-pile

reached Phillis's ear. She recognised his step; her first thought was that when Georgia got home and learned her whereabouts, she had insisted on Maurice's bringing her to share the night's vigil. She leaned over the sill; Maurice saw her, and quickly approached the casement—evidently he had come alone.

"How is your little patient, Miss Phillis?" he asked in an undertone, hastily deciding that such inquiry would be the wisest preliminary observation he could offer.

"She is asleep," Phillis answered; "sleeping very quietly, too."

"I hope I did not startle you," he added.

"No; I saw who it was just as I heard your step. I thought perhaps Georgia had persuaded you to bring her. I am glad she did not come; she is not strong enough for night watching."

"The aunt was not very well, and Georgia stopped with her," Maurice explained. He waited an instant, but as Phillis offered no remark whatever, he thought it best to try and give some plausible reason for his appearance. "I went to your house to tell you, and sat awhile with your grandmother; I had the pleasure of Miss Raine's society also."

"I am sure you enjoyed that," she said; but though she smiled and spoke playfully, Peyton

perceived that she was in one of her gentlest moods, and told himself that if he had reflected, he might have been certain such would be the case, considering the mission which had brought her thither. She looked very lovely, too, in the moonlight, as any pretty woman is sure to do, her great eyes unusually soft, and the delicacy of her complexion heightened by the silvery radiance.

"When I reached home I found Denis had not come," he continued, "and I felt so restless and solitary that I decided to take a stroll—it was too early to think of going to bed."

"It will not be too early by the time you get back," she said, smiling again; "it must be eleven."

"But please let me stay a minute; you have nothing to do while the little girl is asleep. Is she very bad?"

"She does not suffer much, but she is near the end."

"Dying? Poor little thing!"

"Happy little thing, you mean," returned Phillis. "Think what life would be to her here; think what it has been; and then fancy her waking to-morrow morning—in the sunlight up yonder—no more pain to bear, no more privation. I am sorry for the mother, but I cannot help being glad for the child."

"Ah yes, of course! But what will the poor woman do without her?"

"She had a letter only to-day from a relative offering to take the oldest boy; it has made little Miranda so happy."

"And you can tell her, too," said Maurice, "that before I go away I will do whatever you decide will help them most."

"There's a mortgage on the place; poor Plummer died before he had finished paying for it," said Phillis. "A couple of hundred dollars would clear it, and then she could have the use of the land; now it has to be let, in order to pay the interest."

"Then I will arrange that."

"It will be right to do it," was all she said, but he got a glance from her eyes which he felt would have been reward enough for giving thousands, instead of the sum she had named.

"Before I go away," he repeated; "it seems so strange to think of doing so. Miss French, shall you miss—I mean, at least, you will miss Georgia a little."

"I shall miss you both very much," she answered, as frankly as if he had been a relative. "As for losing Georgia—well, that is a necessity which I do not even allow myself to con-

template; time enough to think of it when the evil hour comes."

"And I am to count only as Georgia's brother!"

"Enough to satisfy a king," said she, laughing; but added, "I can't joke to-night."

"Heaven knows I don't want to joke!" he exclaimed, and his voice sounded all the more earnest from the necessity of keeping it subdued. "Won't you ever believe that I can be serious, Miss French?"

"Oh, I daresay you might on occasion," she replied, turning her head to look back into the room, as if she fancied she heard the child stir.

"I didn't dare hope I should be able to speak to you," said he, "but I was determined to have a glimpse of you."

"I am rather pleased you happened to stray along; somehow the complete stillness oppressed me," she answered, but her voice was too composed for him to make any specially personal application of her words. "Hear that owl," she continued; "it sounds like a tiny silver bell. And there is a whippowill — isn't it a pretty note. You don't have whippowills in Europe, Mr Peyton?"

"I beg your pardon? I believe I was thinking of something else."

"Oh, I only attempted a little display of my ornithological knowledge."

"Now I know what you said. No; Europe cannot boast that sad-voiced bird. Do you never think you would like to go there?"

"In order to get rid of the whippowills?" she asked.

"Ah, I thought you said you were not in a mood for jesting."

"You see habit is strong. I suppose I should joke on my way to the stake," she said, and an odd, rather troubled expression, flitted over her face.

She began asking questions about foreign lands, and Maurice managed very adroitly to render the conversation personal, and tell her of hopes and aims which he cherished, for he had an idea that she regarded him as an idler, and knew that he must remove this impression if he expected to gain her full esteem.

She listened, and her remarks showed that she was interested, but he did not venture to add a word which approached tenderness or love-making, though he restrained himself with difficulty, and a wild hope sprang up in his breast that Phillis was not wholly indifferent or incredulous of her power over him.

They had stood there for a full half-hour, and

his talk was growing more and more earnest, when suddenly they heard the sick girl cough.

"Good-bye, now," Phillis said; "she is awake."

"But it is not late—she will fall asleep again," he pleaded.

"Miss Phillis!" the sufferer called.

"Yes, dear," Phillis answered, hurrying towards the bed.

Maurice stood still and watched her; she moved so noiselessly; lifted the child on her pillows so deftly; spoke with such infinite tenderness, that it seemed to Maurice impossible for any other woman to be so marvellously sweet and gentle.

"I heard Mr Peyton's voice," Miranda said, after she had drunk the cool beverage which her nurse held to her lips.

"Yes; he came to inquire how you were."

"He hasn't gone—I can see him by the window. Ask him to come in, Miss Phillis," said Miranda.

Phillis hesitated a little; before she could reply, Maurice swung himself lightly over the sill.

"Here I am, Miranda," he said.

"I'm so glad," she answered, a glow of pleasure lighting her pale, emaciated features. "Come

and sit down. I didn't think I should see you again; I'm dying, you know."

"No, no, dear child!" was all he could say, as he seated himself by the side of the bed and took her hand.

"Oh yes, I am," she replied in a low, thankful voice. "I couldn't get strong again, so it's such a comfort to go—poor mother's got enough on her hands without having me to work for. And oh, did Miss Phillis tell you? Her cousin is going to take Bob."

Phillis was standing by the head of the couch; she leaned over the child and whispered what Maurice had promised to do.

Miranda turned her face towards him with a smile so heavenly, that one might have fancied the light from a higher sphere already illuminated her countenance.

"Let me kiss you!" she said. "That was all I wanted. "Oh, Miss Phillis, doesn't God know just how to manage everything for us!"

Phillis pressed her lips on the child's forehead in silence. Presently Miranda spoke again.

"I can't tell; there ain't any words; oh, I'm so thankful! Just sing one verse, Miss Phillis —my hymn, you know."

And Phillis sang, in a soft undertone, a verse from that sweetest of church melodies, "Nearer,

my God, to Thee," sang with such heavenly sweetness that Peyton felt his eyelids grow moist.

"You are not tiring yourself, little one?" Phillis asked, as she finished.

"No, no; it rests me. I haven't any pain at all now—I'm so comfortable. Mr Peyton, if I'm here to-morrow, you'll bring Miss Georgia to see me, won't you?"

"Certainly I will," he answered.

"I was dreaming about you and Miss Phillis. I expect I heard your voices in my sleep," continued the child, smiling at Maurice again, and softly patting the hand Phillis had laid on her pillow.

"What were you dreaming?" Peyton asked.

"I don't know—you were in such a beautiful place! Somehow I seemed so near, and yet such a way off—and I called out that I was glad you were so happy. Then you both looked up and smiled. Wasn't it a nice dream?"

"Yes," Peyton said, almost in a whisper.

"I've dreamed so much these last nights," continued Miranda, her eyes radiant with an unearthly glory, wandering from Maurice to Phillis, and back again to him. "Only last night I saw father, and he told me not to be troubled—God would manage for poor

mother. That has come true already, so I think my dream about you two will—don't you, Mr Peyton?"

"I hope so," he replied, in a tremulous voice, glancing towards Phillis as he spoke, but she had retreated a little, so that her face was hidden in the shadow.

"Shall you and Miss Georgia go away soon?" the child asked, after a pause.

"Before very long, I suppose."

"And will Miss Phillis go with you?"

"This is my home, dear," Phillis said quickly; "of course I shall stay here with my grandmother."

"Yes—but sometime! Oh, I guess you'll go with him sometime, because I dreamed, you know," said the child, smiling brightly at Maurice. "And if one dream has come true, another may—mayn't it, Mr Peyton?—and you would be glad to have it."

"Very glad," he replied, with such earnestness in his voice that Phillis started; "nothing in the whole world could make me so happy."

He did not look towards her—she did not venture to glance at him; but she knew that such words, uttered at such a moment, must force her to put aside the idea to which she had hitherto clung, that his feeling for

her had no real depth, and the bare thought frightened her.

"She heard!" said the child. "She'll remember — sometime, Mr Peyton, she'll remember."

She lay back rather wearily among her pillows, and Phillis said,—

"We must send Mr Peyton away now; you oughtn't to talk any more, dear."

"And I'm sleepy again," the child answered. "Good-bye, Maurice; that's what Miss Georgia calls you—it's such a pretty name."

"Good-bye," he repeated, kissing her forehead. "I shall come and see you to-morrow, and bring my sister."

"Yes—and if I'm not here—you know!" she raised her hand and pointed upward, smiling still.

Maurice only said good-night to Phillis, and was moving away, when Miranda said,—

"Maybe I'll dream again about your being together—I'll tell her if I do! And sometime—oh sometime you'll both remember what I dreamed —oh, sometime!"

She turned her head on her pillow, and fell asleep before Peyton reached the window. He paused by the sill and looked back; Phillis was standing with her eyes fixed on the

child; but something in her attitude assured him that she was conscious of his scrutiny; he gazed at her with one long, lingering, passionate glance, and then went softly out of the chamber.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE next morning, as early as he could venture to disturb his aunt, Maurice drove over to Wachuset in search of Georgia. They went back by the upper road, instead of taking that which led directly to the Nest, in order to inquire after Miranda.

Miss Raines appeared as the carriage stopped before the door; a glance at her face prevented the necessity for the question which rose to their lips.

The tired soul was at rest; the child had died shortly after sunrise in Phillis's arms. Miss French had gone home, and Ann Raines had come to pass the day with the bereaved mother, having arrived, she informed them, before the little girl breathed her last.

"I will go and speak to poor Mrs Plummer, if you think she would like to see me," Georgia said.

"If anything could comfort her, that would," Miss Raines answered; "she about worships you and Miss Phillis, and that's the truth. She couldn't feel sorrier if the child had been hern, and sartin, no creatur' ever had a better daughter than Mirandy was."

"I shall only stop a few minutes," Georgia said to her brother, as he helped her out of the waggon.

"You needn't hurry," observed Miss Raines, taking an answer upon herself, and delivering it with a bland condescension which was beautiful to witness; "I'll stand here while you're gone. So I guess Mr Peeton won't git very lonesome."

Neither of her listeners could repress a smile, but when Georgia had entered the house, Maurice began asking after Phillis, too full of the recollections of the past night's scene to be in a mood to tease Miss Raines in his usual laughing fashion.

"I am afraid Miss French must have been very tired," he said; "I hoped we should get her in time to take her home."

"Oh, it 'ud need morin one night's watchin' to tucker out Miss Phillis," returned the spinster. "I brought some tea with me, and I made her a good strong cup afore she started—the walk ain't nothin' to speak of, and it'll do her good."

"And the poor little child passed away without pain—that is a comfort," said Peyton.

"It ware indeed, and she was sensible up to the very last. She talked so beautiful to her stepma and the boys—you never heerd the beat—a preacher couldn't have spoke more consolin', and she was as happy as ever you see a child. I ha'in't never been much addicted to religion myself, Mr Peeton—my folks was Calvinists, and give me an overdose when I was little," Miss Raines said, as if speaking of a medicine. "But there's something in religion, when you git hold o' the right sort, and that was what Mirandy had, if ever anybody did."

"Yes," Maurice said, rather absently; he was thinking partly of Phillis, partly of the child; wondering vaguely, as one does at such moments, when the little soul had wakened—if she were conscious of the change—able to look back—exulting over the freedom from pain—the new sense of strength and life. As he recalled the spirit-illumined eyes that had gazed at him on the previous night, so far aloof from the weakness which numbed the physical frame, he involuntarily murmured,—

> "*She has seen the mystery hid*
> *Under Egypt's pyramid;*
> *By those eyelids pale and close*
> *Now she knows what Rhamsee knows.*"

"Hey?" said Miss Raines, staring curiously at him.

"I was only trying to recollect a verse of a little poem," he answered.

"Verses? Oh yes; but the plaguy things never will stay in a body's head. They're poor stuff gen'rally, I suspicion. Miss Phillis, she's fond of 'um though, and yet you couldn't find a clearer head'n hern. It's thinkin' of little Mirandy set you off—wall, there's no denyin' times likes these sort o 'stirs us up. I wish you could a' heerd her talk. She spoke o' you; it was a'mist the last thing she said. Her ma had gone out a minit to warm a blanket to put round her feet 'cause they was cold; no, I guess 'twas to call the littlest boy; wall, 'tain't no matter which—"

"What did the child say?" interrupted Maurice.

"She looked up at Miss Phillis, and says she, 'Tell Mr Peeton I dreamed it again, and—'"

Miss Raines, softened by the recollection, had begun her sentence with a corner of her apron at her eyes, making a horrible grimace in order to keep back a sob, but when she had got so far in her narration, she stopped abruptly and made a fresh grimace, but it was of dismay at her own blunder.

"I dreamed it again, and—well, afterward?" Maurice asked impatiently.

He knew what the end of the sentence had been, but he wanted to hear it repeated, and ask what Phillis had said.

"I declare I clean forgot!" exclaimed Miss Raines. "Jest afore she went away, while we was having a cup o' tea, Miss Phillis she told me not to tell you what the child said; 'twasn't no matter, and might worry you."

"But you may as well finish now," said Peyton.

"Wall," returned Miss Raines contritely, "I s'pose when you've let the head out 'tain't no use tryin' to hide there's a cat in the bag; but don't you tell Miss Phillis. Nothin' riles her like not keepin' your word, and I wouldn't ha' told for nothin', but I'm kind o' upset, and I said it afore I thought."

"I will tell no one—I give you my word," cried Maurice.

"Then this was the hull on it," says she, "tell Mr Peeton I dreamed it agin, and it's sure to come true sometime—sure!"

At another moment Peyton might have derided his own folly, but as he remembered the child's eyes when she had talked with him on the previous night, the smile with which she

had regarded him, the strange, far-seeing glance which seemed to gaze away into futurity as she uttered that promise in regard to himself and Phillis; he could not help receiving it as an omen—a prophecy upon which he might build.

"I don't know no more'n Adam what she meant," continued Miss Raines, "and you can't ask questions of Miss Phillis when she don't want you to; but it's atween you and me now, and you musn't forget and let it out as I did."

"No, no; I promise. Did you hear what Miss Phillis said?"

"Oh, she didn't say anything, I guess; she just sat down behind the bed and cried like a baby, and she don't do that easy. But she was powerful fond o' that child, and to see her a passin' away as meek as a lamb was too much for the minit, and no wonder, for pinks and hyacinths ain't sweeter 'n Mirandy was, and books on books not fuller of sense 'n than that head o' hern."

And now Miss Raines broke down completely, proving that she had sensibilities and a heart under the cast-iron exterior which hid those qualities.

By the time she had dried her eyes, Georgia came back; the brother and sister bade the spinster good morning, and drove on towards

the Nest. As they came in sight of Bourke's house, Peyton said,—

"I shall miss Denis. He told me yesterday he had to go early this morning into Wachuset. He must have gone before now."

"I might as well get out here," observed Georgia; "it will save Joe Grimshaw's going down to bring the horse and waggon back, and I shall be glad of the walk."

"Just as you like," said Maurice; "I'll go through the fields with you."

The gate was open and he drove in, but as the carriage neared the house, Georgia saw Denis Bourke standing in the verandah. Had she supposed there was a chance of his being at home she would not have uttered her proposition.

A sudden recollection of the first visit she had paid to his house rushed into her mind, of his coming out to welcome her as he was doing now. How long ago that time seemed—how rapidly and how much she had lived since then! Oh, in spite of her resolves, her worldly theories to which she clung with a sort of frightened obstinacy, she was so changed in many ways; forced also to admit that the changes had gone too deep to be less than momentous—as startling as they were important.

"Hallo, old man!" cried Maurice, as he checked his horses at the foot of the steps. "We didn't expect to find you! So you are back safe from your expedition."

"Oh, an hour ago," Bourke replied. "Good morning, Miss Grosvenor; this is a very pleasant surprise."

"When two models like us give a surprise, it must necessarily be pleasant," returned Maurice, and Georgia was grateful to him for unconsciously aiding her by his words to obtain another instant to shake off the nervous sensation which her hasty reflection, as they approached the house, had roused.

"Of course," returned Denis gaily, looking at Georgia, his eyes eloquent with pleasure, which he made no effort to hide. "You will get out, now you are here, Miss Grosvenor."

"I decided to walk the rest of the way," she said, as she let him help her to descend.

"You don't even ask where we come from so early," said Maurice.

"Oh, I know already—there are never any secrets in this neighbourhood," replied Denis. "Miss Grosvenor spent the night with her aunt, and you have been to fetch her."

"You must own a private telephone, Mr Bourke," said Georgia.

"Miss Raines is equal to half-a-dozen," he answered; "she stopped here on her way to Mrs Plummer's, and told Patrick. So that poor child is out of her suffering?"

"Yes, happily," said Georgia.

"Will I find Joe Grimshaw at the barn?" asked Maurice.

"Yes; but Patrick will take the horse round."

"I'll go myself; I want to speak to Joe a moment," said Peyton.

"You mustn't keep me waiting, Maurice," said Georgia; "I've oceans to do this morning, and want to get home."

"All right, my queen! I'll be back in a trice," said her brother, and drove off down the road which led to the stables.

"Will you come in, Miss Grosvenor?" Bourke asked.

"Thanks, no; it is too pleasant here! What a beautiful morning."

"Perfect," said Bourke. "Do you know what I was thinking when I saw you drive up?"

"That I was a very early visitor, I should imagine," returned Georgia, laughing, though her heart beat a little quickly—she knew what thought had been in his mind.

"No; of the first time you ever came here—

how long ago it seems, and yet the time has fled so fast."

"Somehow it always does in a quiet place," said Georgia. "Had you and Mr Caruthers a pleasant expedition?"

She asked the question merely to ward off any serious conversation, then as soon as she had done so, remembered that to bring up that gentleman's name was the most unfortunate remark she could have offered, considering her wish.

"Oh yes; we were all as jolly as possible! Three of the directors were with us—your great admirer, old Mr Winter, among the party. We barely escaped a drenching, and had to spend the night at Hummins's tavern."

"I hope you were comfortable," said Georgia, as seriously as if the matter were of vast importance.

"Perfectly! But please don't mind the expedition now! I want to say something to you, and I have only a moment—that wretched Maurice will be back directly," said he, with his usual bluntness in following out any purpose; often putting Georgia at a disadvantage by a downrightness to which she was unaccustomed, and so getting his own way even when she felt vexed at her inability to combat his weapons—she, who

hitherto had always been so successful in managing her admirers.

"Please be good-natured, and don't tease me this morning," she said, taking refuge in feminine coaxing.

"I don't mean to tease you—I hope I never do that! But this is a serious thing! You have not yet told Mr Caruthers that you cannot marry him."

Georgia could only feel troubled, not irritated, by his persistence upon that subject, but she tried her best to turn his speech against himself.

"You must let me first decide what my own intentions are in regard to the matter," she said.

"Miss Grosvenor—Georgia!" he exclaimed, and though his face and voice were full of tenderness, a tone of reproach was audible. "Why should you say this to me or yourself? You know that you do not mean it—you know—"

"I tell you I have not made up my mind," she interrupted.

"But you told me what must necessarily prevent your considering his proposal further," Bourke said gravely, though speaking as gently as ever. "There are women who might defy their hearts and buy wealth and position at such an awful price, but you are not a woman like that—you can't do it!"

"I don't know that I have much heart—haven't I told you so?" cried she, irritated, not against him, but what she termed her own weakness in never being able to keep from being thrilled and moved by his presence and his words.

"You used to tell yourself so, but these months have taught you that it is idle to try any longer to believe it," he said.

"Mr Bourke, you are taking a very unfair advantage of a few hasty words spoken when I was frightened and troubled," she answered.

"You admitted that you cared for me—neither you or I can ever forget that," he said softly, but looking in her face with eyes full of pride and exultant joy.

"And I told you then, as I have done since, that such caring was to be lived over—rooted out," she said; but firm as her words were, she could hear her voice quiver a little in their utterance.

"If it can be done!" he cried. "Ah, Georgia, you may call me vain—presumptuous—but you know that each day shows you more and more plainly how difficult that would be."

"Very well—I will not deny it!" she answered. "But that only makes me the more resolute, for your sake and my own! I am not entirely selfish—I do think of you."

"You—selfish! You don't know what the word means!" he said, looking prouder and more exultant than before, and stirring Georgia's soul to its very depths by the infinite tenderness in his eyes.

"Oh, I can't talk to you this morning! Why doesn't Maurice hurry back?" she cried. "I have just come from seeing that poor woman; I am disturbed and nervous; you always seize some such moment to tyrannise; oh, I think it is you who are selfish!"

"I should be, if it were only of myself I thought," he replied. "But putting my love out of the question—we are friends, Georgia, and I have a friend's right to warn you, and I must! You are unjust to Mr Caruthers in keeping him in suspense."

"Really, it is very good of you to plead his cause!" retorted she, endeavouring to speak scornfully.

"Don't try," he said; "you can't sneer if you would. You know I am right; you know you will be more at peace when that matter is definitely settled."

"More at peace when I have thrown away what I prize—wealth, position, the gratification of my ambitions?" demanded she.

"Yes; because your heart will cease to

struggle and ache when it finds that you have placed it beyond your power to break it," he said. "Georgia, you can't marry Mr Caruthers—you know that you cannot—put yourself and him out of pain by telling him so."

"You have no right to interfere; no right to talk to me in this way," faltered she, vainly trying still to be angry.

"Every right," he answered; "because I love you; because you care for me; and it is my sacred duty to help you to guard yourself from unhappiness."

"I protest, you take a strange way to guard me," she exclaimed, half laughing, yet near tears; "doing your best to convince me that a little—a little folly on my part where you are concerned ought to lead me on far enough to—to—"

"To make you listen to your heart and mine," he whispered.

She started up from her seat.

"Since Maurice does not appear, I shall go in search of him," said she.

Bourke laid his hand gently on hers as it rested upon the back of her chair.

"I know that you will do what is right, though you do try to be vexed," he said. "You will not delay any longer; you will tell Mr Caruthers the truth."

"I shall make no promise," she answered.

"But you will do it—do it at once!"

And Georgia could not contradict, for she knew that she should at the first opportunity. The burthen of concealment had been growing each day more intolerable, and somehow, as she listened to Bourke, and saw her hesitation by the honest light in his loving eyes, her having so long deferred her explanation to Mr Caruthers seemed worse than a weakness—a deliberate wrong to him, as cruel as it was dishonourable.

"Yes; I will do it—to-day if possible," she replied.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with a deep breath of satisfaction, and again that exultant eagerness kindled his face, but the very thrill which it roused in Georgia's heart was an added consciousness of weakness, to fight against which she nerved herself to say,—

"And after that, Mr Bourke, you must leave me to the peace you have promised such action would bring."

"It will come, independently of me," he said.

"You must understand," she hurried on, "that in both cases—for him and for you—my decision is irrevocable. If I am silly enough to let romantic scruples stand in the way of my

future, I am not weak enough to allow romance to ruin that future utterly."

He only patted her hand softly, and said as he might have spoken to a wayward child,—

"Poor Georgia—poor little Georgia! How hard she tries to make herself believe her false theories stronger than her heart, but they are not—they are not."

"Her reason and common sense can act still, Denis Bourke; she will never reach any pass where they will wholly lose their sway, you may be sure of that," she answered in as cold a voice as she could summon. Then her conscience pricked her so sorely that she could not resist adding, "Oh, you make me say such harsh things to you—I don't want to! I can't bear to have you think me unwomanly, utterly hard and strong."

"I shall never think you anything but the most impulsive and generous of women," he said.

"I am not—I am not!" she cried. "I hate to talk so, but I, you must understand, I must convince you that this—this folly is at an end. We are friends; we can never be anything more."

But he only whispered,—

"I love you, and you—you care for me!"

At the instant, to Georgia's intense relief, Maurice came up the lane, but she was aware that she felt even a greater necessity to escape from her own weakness, than even to quit Denis Bourke and his pleadings.

She wanted a moment to herself before meeting Maurice, and said hastily,—

"I must speak to Tabitha."

She hurried off just as Maurice reached the steps.

"Where is Georgia going?" he asked, catching the flutter of her dress as she ran down the hall.

"Only to the kitchen; she and P. French always pet old Tabitha when they come here," Bourke answered.

The two men stood for a few moments in the door talking about unimportant matters. Presently Georgia appeared at the further end of the corridor, calling,—

"Come, Maurice! Good morning, Mr Bourke! I am in a terrible hurry, and cannot wait to be ceremonious."

Away she sped, so fast that Maurice did not overtake her till she reached the zigzags; but whatever he might have thought about the abruptness of her departure, he made no remark.

## CHAPTER XII.

MR CARUTHERS had been growing restless and somewhat uneasy during these past days. He perceived a great change in Georgia—not in her manner towards himself. She treated him as she had always done—as a valued friend; but there was a nervousness about her, amounting at times to actual trouble, the cause for which he tried by close study to fathom.

Aunt Conyngham remained wilfully blind, as acute people sometimes do at an important crisis, declaring that she saw nothing odd in Georgia; the dear girl was not so thoroughly restored to health as she had expected to find her, but otherwise they had every reason for satisfaction.

She fairly laughed at Mr Caruthers's fears, rooted firmly in her belief that he would eventually win his prize—a credence based princi-

pally, though she did not tell him so, on a conviction that a young woman brought up under her charge could not be insane enough to fling away a future more brilliant and satisfactory in every respect than life was likely again to offer.

The restraint she exercised to keep aloof from the dangerous subject, and avoid all risk of annoying her niece, showed positive heroism; and, perceiving it, Georgia rather pitied the autocratic, managing woman, though she reflected that after all she was herself the person needing sympathy. When Aunt Conyngham learned her decision, as she soon must, a storm would burst such as had never disturbed the usually even tenor of their domestic relations, and might indeed break them up wholly, for Georgia knew that, roused beyond a certain limit, her relative could be very hard and unforgiving.

The day after her visit to Bourke's house, Miss Grosvenor was sitting alone in the garden; she believed herself meditating, but was only allowing dreary fancies to stray at will through her mind. She had refused to go and walk with Phillis and Maurice; grandma had lain down, and she trusted that at this hour no visitor would be likely to appear. But she had

not sat there long when she saw Denis Bourke coming along the centre path.

She had been in one of her worst moods all the morning; mortified by her inability to use her reason; railing at the inconsistency which prevented her accepting a destiny replete with wealth and influence, and the sight of the joy in Denis's face roused her to hot anger—anger against herself and him, and mixed therewith a sharp, bitter pain—a wild, passionate regret over the necessity of giving up her beautiful dream.

"Actually alone!" he exclaimed, approaching with outstretched hands. "I began to think I should never find you so again."

"I stayed alone from choice," she replied, trying to speak coldly, but hearing that her voice only sounded querulously plaintive.

"And you wish I would go away," he said, smiling still, with that eager look in his eyes, which set her heart beating like a frightened bird's.

"Yes, I do," she answered, aware that she was behaving like a capricious child, rather than her ordinary composed, well-mannered self.

"Then I will," said he. "At least I have had a peep at you. I had not seen you all day and—"

"Oh!" she broke in, with a gesture which declared plainly that any word of pleading or tenderness would drive her to the verge of disgust.

"And I could not decide whether the dimple in your right cheek or the left was the deepest," he continued, putting his head on one side and surveying her with ludicrous gravity.

The conclusion of the sentence was so different from what she had expected—so much more like Maurice's absurd fun than Bourke's usual conduct, and the nonsense so out of keeping with her own excited voice and almost tragic gesture, that in spite of herself she could not keep from laughing.

"It is the left," cried he. "I said so, but P. French vowed that it was the right, and dared me to come and look. I met her and Maurice."

"P. French is one of the few people in the world who can be graceful in her absurdity," observed Georgia dryly, with a new attempt at stateliness.

"Now, don't be hard on a fellow," laughed Denis. "I daresay I am more awkward than ever these last few days; but you see I never was really happy before, and it makes me quite wild."

She half rose.

"Going?" he demanded.

"I asked you to," she said, emphasising the second pronoun.

"Ah, so you did," he answered, with unimpaired cheerfulness; "I know sometimes one is not in the mood to see any human being."

"Indeed, yes," said Georgia, though she began to feel ashamed of her behaviour, and added, "Please don't think me the rudest woman you ever met, Mr Bourke."

He came close to her and whispered,—

"You may treat me as you like. I shall not complain." He took her hand for an instant, but did not offer to kiss it. "God bless you, Georgia!" he cried, and walked away through the garden.

As he disappeared, she saw Herbert Caruthers coming up the path from the gate. He was so near that he must have seen Bourke holding her hand; perhaps have caught his parting exclamation—must see too the vivid carnation which had suddenly dyed her cheeks; but that faded as quickly as it came—she felt herself turn pale and cold.

But whatever Mr Caruthers might have seen, he approached with his ordinary composure;

though as she glanced at him, she fancied that the maintaining it was an effort, and she knew that the moment of explanation had arrived.

"Good morning, Miss Grosvenor," he said, holding out his hand.

"Good morning! I need not ask after my aunt, for I saw her in the forenoon. She and Mrs Thirstane were going to drive over to some place near Crampton."

"Yes; they have gone. Your aunt told me you had been at the hotel. I was sorry to have missed you."

"And you were not tempted to drive with them?"

"I don't think they wanted anybody. They seemed to have some mystery on foot from which all masculine creatures were to be excluded."

"I fancy Mrs Thirstane means to delude that rich old coal-dealer who has given his name to the village, into bestowing something more substantial for the hospital she worries all her friends about so constantly."

"Very possibly," he said, a little absently.

"Will you sit down?" she asked, pointing to a chair near. "You did not walk over?"

"No, I rode; but I left my horse at the stable

by the post-office," he answered, seating himself opposite her. "I am very fortunate in finding you alone."

Almost the very words with which Denis Bourke had saluted her; only Denis had let his eyes imply the good luck he considered it, and had thereby gained in eloquence.

"Miss French has gone out, and the dear old grandma is lying down," Georgia said, just for the sake of saying something.

"Not indisposed, I trust?" said Mr Caruthers, in a tone of polite interest, which showed that his remark emanated from the same cause as her own.

"Oh no; but as she rises early she usually finds the need of a little rest in the afternoon," Georgia explained.

"Very naturally at her age," said Mr Caruthers.

"Oh, very naturally," echoed Georgia, and knew they were both behaving as if their brains had softened. There might be some excuse for the man, but there was none for her. "May I get you some iced lemonade?" she asked. "Or I can give you claret and ice? Maurice keeps me liberally supplied with claret and sherry, for his own convenience."

But Mr Caruthers would have neither the

mild beverage nor the stimulant. He was not thirsty—rarely drank even a glass of water between his meals. Upon receiving this valuable bit of information, Georgia observed that the rule was no doubt an excellent one, and added that Americans were too much given to iced drinks of all sorts; and he agreed with her. Oh, they were both rapidly growing more and more imbecile—all her fault too.

However, in a moment Mr Caruthers made it apparent that he did not intend to be further effected by her idiocy, for he observed,—

"I am very glad to have found you alone; there is a good deal that I want to say, if you can have the patience to listen."

He was rushing into the middle of things at once; she must speak—must tell him—and it was so hard!

"I did not want you to fear I had come here to persecute you," he said, before she had managed even a monosyllable in reply to his first speech; "so I have waited and—and tried to make myself as pleasant as I know how," he concluded, with the grave smile which suited his face so well.

"You are always everything that is kind," Georgia said quickly, longing by some means to soften the blow which she must deal.

"At all events, it is like you to say so," he answered.

He paused there; she could not articulate a syllable; could only sit wondering stupidly if he would never speak again—wondering, too, how she was to reply. She felt so guilty towards him—that was the prominent reflection in her mind, and mingled therewith came an odd sensation, not exactly regret, not wholly anger, a kind of vehement outcry against fate and her own folly, because she must throw away the prize she had always longed for—worldly honours and wealth, with respect and esteem for the person who bestowed them upon her. He looked too so thorough a gentleman in the highest signification of the much ill-treated word—so thoroughly gentle and noble! It was only necessary to study his face to gain the certainty that he had never in his whole life committed an action for which he need blush; and in addition, the features revealed so much intellectual strength, that in spite of the fine lines which had begun to gather about the eyes, and the tinge of grey here and there silvering his thick curling chesnut locks, it would not have been easy to find any youthful countenance more attractive.

Now he resumed his speech; it seemed to

Georgia that he had been silent an endless while, and she countless leagues away, even while thinking brokenly the things I have set down.

"You know I have as yet decided nothing about my plans for the next few years," he said; "or rather you have not, for I wrote you that I should leave the decision in your hands."

It required a terrible effort, but she must speak—she must! She thought that she could never again endure such pain as she did in this moment, not even if called upon to pronounce sentence against her own heart. He had gone beyond admiration—he loved her, and the new strange personal experience which had come during these past weeks rendered her more sympathetic, because better able to appreciate his disappointment.

"In your hands," he repeated.

"You must not, Mr Caruthers," she said tremulously; "you must form your own decision, entirely independent of me in any way."

She glanced up at him with a face that pleaded for pardon, full of sympathy and regret. The look rather than the words brought home to him a conviction of her meaning. He grew white to his very lips, but his voice was much more composed than hers, as he slowly answered,—

"Tell me exactly what I am to understand by that, Miss Grosvenor?"

"Oh, you know!" she cried. "I am very sorry—I—oh, Mr Caruthers, don't force me to say it more plainly!"

Whiter he could not grow; but Georgia thought that, never while life lasted, could she forget the exquisite suffering depicted in his features; and yet he looked at her with a smile, so full of kindness, of sympathy for the misery this confession cost her, that she longed to fall at his feet, and beseech forgiveness.

"I told you I did not intend to persecute you," he said. "I will not distress you any more than I can help. I will say it for you —you mean you cannot give me any hope."

She bowed her head; he turned his away for a little, but she could see his whole frame tremble, while his hands knotted themselves hard over the arms of his chair; yet, when he glanced back at her, that kindly, pitying smile was still on his lips.

"You are speaking after months of reflection," he said. "I know you meant to be just—to yourself and me—"

"Oh, Mr Caruthers!"

"Yes; I understand. But I don't want you to feel self-reproach; there is no reason why you

should. No human being could deal more fairly by another than you have by me from first to last; never dream that I shall think anything else."

"You are so good—so good," she murmured.

It was all she could say; but no words could have expressed her respect. She felt that, much as she had always admired him, she had never half appreciated his nobleness; and she was sending him away—for what? A folly, a romantic dream, which she knew could never be realised. Oh, surely never before was woman so mad—so hopelessly idiotic!

"You have decided that you cannot marry me," he continued, after a pause; and it seemed to Georgia that if some great hero, unjustly condemned, were reading his own death-warrant, he would have read it in the same tone. "You cannot marry me! I—I don't want to hurt you; I know how your kind heart feels for me—but I find that I have been more presumptuous than I knew. I have built hopes which you never gave me any right to do—I—well, you must say it; somehow I can't believe till I have heard you. Forgive me; don't think me cruel."

"Oh, I think you are the noblest man in the world!" she cried, struggling to keep back her tears.

"But you cannot marry me?"

"I cannot," she faltered; "I cannot."

And now a sob choked her utterance, and two hot drops rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"Don't—don't cry!" he exclaimed. "It makes me feel such a brute to see you suffer!"

"Oh, if you knew how ashamed I am—how guilty I feel!" she said.

"There is no reason, Miss Grosvenor—none. Believe me, no personal pain can be so great as to know that I am causing you suffering. I repeat it—from first to last you have been more than just—generous; and I thank you."

This final stroke was more than Georgia's morbidly roused conscience could bear. She covered her face with her hands, and wept unrestrainedly. She heard him utter broken words of pained expostulation, but could not check her sobs. Then he rose, and paced up and down the garden path. She appeared doomed of late in any crisis to behave in a manner so unlike what she was accustomed to doing—to show weak and childish in moments demanding the most need of appearing a real woman—that her self-respect was quite crushed. To sit helplessly weeping at this juncture, when she ought to be comforting him—taking advan-

tage of her feminine privilege of weakness, as if she did it to keep him from blaming her—seemed so unworthy, that for the rest of her days she must heartily despise this miserable creature, so different from all former conceptions of her own identity.

She struggled into an assumption of composure at length, and called softly,—

"Mr Caruthers!"

He came back to where she sat. And now a new fancy hurt her bewildered sense—a strong brave man, returning from a grave where he had just buried everything which could make life worth possessing, might look as he did!

"You are better; that is right," he said gently.

"Yes—yes. Forgive me for teasing you by my tears. I—I don't cry very often."

"I ought to thank you, since they were a sign of sympathy for me," he answered. "But I can't have you suffer—that hurts me worse than—I mean I can't bear it."

"And we are friends—you promise?"

"While life lasts," he said solemnly, extending his hand. She held it for an instant between hers, with a glow of respect such as she had never before felt for any human being. If she could be said to have any thought clear amid the trouble

in her mind, it was a wonder over her own stupidity in never having appreciated this man, and added thereto a consciousness that, had she been clear-sighted enough, noble enough, to do so, she should have loved him from the first. "And now let us talk as two friends ought," he continued, after a brief pause, as she withdrew her hands and let them fall in her lap. "We cannot leave the matter just here; but try to think it is not I who am speaking—I mean not the man who asked you to be his wife, but the friend whom you can trust, to whom your peace and happiness are dearer than his own."

"Say anything you like," she said, her voice quivering anew, her remorseful admiration, if possible, growing stronger at each fresh proof of his magnanimity.

"It is this. Don't forget there was to be no love asked on your side. Wait—wait—you need not tremble! It is not the tiresome man who has worried you so long that speaks; it is your friend—your friend, who would give his life to serve you!"

Oh, the infinite tenderness of his voice!—oh, the superhuman sweetness of his smile! both elevated, inspired fairly, by the strength which comes to one who has fought and conquered, reached the height so few human beings ever

attain, complete victory over self, the ability to regard personal aims as nothing compared to the welfare of the object beloved.

"If I were only worthy," she murmured. "Oh, I don't deserve your goodness, I don't deserve it!"

"Hush, hush!" he said. "My friend deserves everything that is best and brightest. This was what I wanted to say. That tiresome Herbert promised to be content with friendship, with esteem—you can give him those?"

"Such as I shall never give any other living soul," she cried.

"Then—oh, don't think me cruel; but in that case, it seems to me there is hope left him still."

"No," she gasped, "none—none."

While he was speaking, a momentary light had flashed into his eyes; it died out under her words, leaving the face with a new pain upon it—a sudden and terrible fear.

"That could not be," he said, "unless these later months have brought you what you used to think would never come near your heart."

She was silent, her eyes sank under his, a burning blush suffused her cheeks; he was answered.

"Then it is so? There is some one who stands between us—between you and the man who hoped to call you his wife?"

"Yes," she whispered.

She dared not look up; she heard him give one gasping breath, then everything was still for a little. Presently he said,—

"You are sure? There is some man you love?"

"It's a folly—a madness—and I know it!" she exclaimed. "But that is it! If—if—things were as when we parted—but I cannot—it would be wicked—you would not let me!"

Her voice died away in a sob; again silence followed, she sitting with her head bowed upon her hand. At last he said,—

"I must go now. I—I am a good deal shaken; I had not thought of that happening. Forgive me if I have hurt you. To-morrow—I will see you to-morrow. But we are friends—always friends, remember that."

He walked away without further leave-taking; she let him go without a word, without looking up.

After a while she, too, rose, went into the house, and mounted the stairs to her chamber. Phillis and Maurice were entering by the door at the further end of the long passage; she did not perceive them. Maurice was about to call to her, but Phillis had caught sight of Georgia's face; she signed to him not to speak. They stood

quiet until she disappeared, then Phillis stepped back upon the grass.

"What is it? What do you mean?" Maurice demanded in wonder. "You are as mysterious as if something astounding had happened."

"Something has happened," returned Phillis; "if you were not as dull as only a man can be, you would have perceived that."

"What?"

"She has sent Mr Caruthers away."

"O-oh!" ejaculated Maurice, his surprise too great for other utterance.

Phillis French moved towards the garden, and he followed.

"Poor Georgia," she said; "I must leave her alone for a while. I am very sorry for her."

"I didn't believe she'd have done it!" cried Maurice.

"That's because you are incapable of appreciating her," said Phillis.

"I devote all my energies to appreciating you," he answered.

"A terrible waste of time."

"Do you mean you are not worth it?"

"Or that it is a task beyond your powers, Sir Modesty."

"When will you begin to believe in me?" he asked.

"I believe lots of things about you already," retorted she.

"You know you will have to be convinced at last," he exclaimed. "I shall no more give up than—oh, than Jacob did when he served so long for that very deceitful Rachael."

"At present, I think it is I who serve—you want more waiting on than any man I ever saw."

"A slander—but no matter. Say, when do you mean to believe in me?"

"I'll consider the business—that is, if you can produce any foundation for a belief."

"You have it, and you know you have. Come, if I serve as patiently as Jacob—not so long, for we are not patriarchs—"

"You will be before that time comes."

"But when it does—months or years hence—for I'll never give up! When you are forced to admit that I love you—"

"Yes; skip the poetry."

"What will you say?"

He tried to take her hands, but she put them behind her back. He thought she looked a little conscious, though; the dimples which swarmed about her mouth gave way to a sudden sweet gravity of expression. He could almost hope she was touched, but he knew

that any show of earnestness, any open pleading, would do no good whatever.

"What will you answer?" he persisted.

"I shall say—go back to Leah!" she cried, and with a merry laugh, ran off to join her grandmother, whom she had just seen come out of the house.

## CHAPTER XIII.

BOURKE did not visit the Nest that night, and the next morning when Georgia went downstairs very late, pale and heavy-eyed from the effects of a dismal vigil, unduly and unwillingly prolonged till near daylight, Phillis met her with highly acceptable tidings.

"We are to have rest and peace," she said; "your brother and Messrs Bourke and Caruthers have gone off with a party of other tiresome men on some wild-goose expedition, goodness knows where, and won't be back till bed-time."

Georgia rejoiced to hear the tidings, and while eating her breakfast received a note from her aunt which afforded her equal satisfaction. Mrs Conyngham and Sybil Mayford were going to spend the day with some acquaintance of the Thirstanes, so there would be no one to in-

trude upon the repose which Georgia so sorely needed.

And very pleasant the respite proved; Phillis was kindness itself, only betraying her perception of her friend's trouble and agitation by the utmost gentleness and consideration, while grandma, saying and believing that Georgia had overtasked her strength lately by too many fatiguing expeditions, petted her in the sweetest imaginable fashion.

"It has been perfectly delightful, Phil," pronounced Georgia, as they were separating for the night. "I wish the rest of the earth would break off, and just leave you and grandma and me to be quiet in the Nest—oh, for a year at least."

"I wish it would," said Phillis; "though I am afraid we should peck at each other a good deal, if there were no other birds for us to peck. Now, to prove that you have enjoyed yourself, go to sleep and don't wake till morning. I will not have you take up those wretched town tricks you had when you first came, of not eating and sleeping, and so I tell you fairly."

"Oh, Phil, how long ago it seems!" cried Georgia.

"It does and it doesn't," quoth Phillis French.

"To bed, young woman, to bed! If your light is not out in a quarter of an hour, you'll have the person of the house to deal with, and if you look as tired to-morrow as you have lately, there'll be such a reckoning in store for you, old lady—such a reckoning!"

"I won't—I mean to sleep," Georgia declared.

She kept her word; she really passed a comfortable night, and appeared so refreshed the next morning that grandma and Phillis were in ecstasies; she felt, too, mentally stronger and clearer than she had done for days.

She ordered her horse early, without waiting for Maurice to make his appearance, took a gallop over the hills, then rode into the town to see her aunt.

But there her restored spirits met with a check. She learned that their departure must be still further, even indefinitely prolonged.

Mrs Mayford had fallen in getting out of the carriage the evening before, and sprained her ankle. The Thirstanes were obliged to go back to town immediately, having received news of the illness of a near relative—an illness so dangerous that none of the family could remain behind.

"Of course I must stop," Mrs Conyngham said. "I can't leave poor Sybil alone."

"I suppose not," Georgia replied. "Oh dear me, I am very sorry for her; but she is always doing something inconsiderate."

"This time it is her misfortune! Naturally, she wouldn't have sprained her ankle if she could have helped it."

"Still, if she hadn't tried to skip like the hills in the Scripture—just to show her agility, it wouldn't have happened," Georgia said, laughing.

"Oh, you dislike her, you know!"

"And you must admit I have reason! She detests me, and never hesitates to show it in all sorts of mean, petty ways."

"Ah, that is on account of Mr Caruthers!" cried Aunt Conyngham. "Poor Sybil! She always hoped to catch him at last; it was cruel of you to come back from Europe and upset her plans."

"Why, he dislikes her worse than I do."

"I know it, my dear, and so does she, only her vanity refuses to recognise the fact! She is not bad, merely weak; and I am fond of her, though we do quarrel when she grows catty about you! There is no help for it—I can't desert her, so you must make up your mind to stop."

"At all events the weather is charming, and promises to hold," Georgia said, occupied mentally

in wondering what fate meant by such persistence in detaining her in this spot which had become filled with elements of unrest that rendered it very different from the enchanted land it had at first appeared.

"And we will keep Mr Caruthers as long as we can," observed Aunt Conyngham, looking her full in the face.

"We will allow Mr Caruthers to do just as he pleases! We can't condemn him to stop here for ever because we seem likely to do so," replied Georgia pleasantly, though with an inward quaking lest her relative might choose this opportunity to ask difficult questions.

"Now, own that he grows more charming every day!" cried Aunt Conyngham.

"Indeed, I will!" Georgia said.

"And that I have been very good—"

"Yes, yes!"

"But you must not be too hard on him! My dear girl, I know—I have always been certain—what your decision will eventually be! You were quite right to take time for reflection—but remember how much you have had!"

To Georgia's great relief, Rosalie appeared at this critical juncture with the information that Mrs Mayford would be glad to see Miss Grosvenor.

But the little lady had deceived herself in thinking she should enjoy the visit. The sight of Georgia looking brilliantly handsome—at her very best, as she always appeared in a riding habit, proved too much for Mrs Mayford's nerves, as the mirror opposite the couch where she lay showed her own image older and more faded than usual after a long night of pain.

In a few moments she began to put out her claws ; Georgia was sorry enough for her to display exemplary patience, which so highly exasperated the widow that she proceeded to scratch, rendering herself so disagreeable that Aunt Conyngham at length rebelled and told her she was too tired to talk, therefore they would go away.

But a pleading message soon followed them ; the doctor had not arrived ; the injured ankle required bathing ; would Mrs Conygham please return.

"Wait till I come back, Georgia," said her aunt.

"I will, if madam doesn't keep you too long ; but I don't want to miss seeing Maurice," Georgia answered.

Mrs Conyngham departed, rather objurgating fate because it had not sent Mr Caruthers to take advantage of the opportunity her absence offered. Luckily she met him in the hall.

"I was just coming to ask how you find yourself this morning," he said, "though I feared it might be unconscionably early."

"Not a bit! But Sybil Mayford has just sent for me; go and entertain Georgia—she is in my room—till I come back."

So after a little talk concerning the invalid, Mr Caruthers walked on and tapped at the door of the salon, and Mrs Conyngham hurried away to her post of duty, so well satisfied that she was prepared to bear with her patient in an exemplary fashion she might not have been able to do, but for the kindness fate had shown in sending Mr Caruthers along at the right instant.

Georgia hearing the knock, supposed it to be a servant, and was somewhat taken aback, when, in answer to her permission to enter, the opening door brought her face to face with Mr Caruthers. However, it was too nonsensical to let herself be fluttered, and he came forward with his usual manner so unaltered, greeting her so pleasantly and easily, that his example helped to overcome her feeling of restraint.

"I was coming to ask after your aunt," he said, "but I met her going to visit her patient. She told me I should find you here, and gave me leave to keep you company. You have been out for an early ride, I see."

"Yes; the morning was so lovely that I could not resist the temptation," Georgia answered. "I was very sorrow to hear of Mrs Mayford's accident."

"She passed a very tolerable night, Mrs Conyngham tells me. The doctor says if she is careful, she will be all right in ten days or so—at least able to travel."

"I am afraid the difficulty will be to make her careful," Georgia said.

She is a very restless little person certainly," returned Mr Caruthers, with a somewhat quizzical smile.

"And indeed a sprain requires more patience than most people can find," Georgia said, with a good nature which Mrs Mayford would have been far from showing in regard to her had the cases been reversed. "If one is really ill, one somehow finds the fortitude to endure, but to be tied fast to a sofa by a troublesome ankle might have irritated Job himself."

"Yes," Mr Caruthers assented rather absently. Georgia feared that he was going to let the conversation drop; she dreaded a silence; it seemed a pity for him not to assist when they had a topic ready to hand, upon which they might enlarge indefinitely without effort. But before she could manage any other remark, either in re-

gard to sprains in general or Mrs Mayford's particular misfortune, he said, "So your stay here will be still further prolonged."

"Aunt really cannot leave her poor friend alone," Georgia replied; "but indeed she doesn't seem to mind stopping."

"And you?"

"Oh, on some accounts—I mean I believe I was ready to go home," she said, colouring at the thought in her mind—the reason which had made her willing, eager to get away.

"Will you answer a question frankly—without any fear of hurting my feelings?"

"Well," she asked.

"Your aunt is good enough to want me to stop as long as I can—will it annoy you if I do?"

"I should be the most ungrateful woman in the world if it would!" she exclaimed.

He smiled rather sadly at her exaggerated mode of speech, which rose out of her gratitude at this fresh evidence of his consideration for her, but only said,—

"Then I shall stay for a while."

"I am sure you could not find a lovelier place for enjoying this fine weather—it really seems a shame to shut oneself up between city walls as long as it lasts."

He bowed assent.

"I have to thank you," he said, "for trusting your friend."

"I shall always do that," she answered eagerly. "I wish, Mr Caruthers, I could make you understand how deeply I appreciate all your goodness to me—your patience with me!"

Then she remembered these were cold crumbs of comfort to offer a man whom she had refused, the one thing she could give which he would have prized, and wished she had remained silent.

"I don't know about the goodness or patience," he said; "but I suppose there can be no real friendship unless both parties display the two."

A few days before she would have mentally styled this a very stiff, lawyer-like speech, but it did not strike her so now.

"I'm afraid," she observed, "that I have not much of either quality to show."

"I can't permit my friends to be maligned," he said, with that rare smile which she had only yesterday discovered was so beautiful. "But since we have strayed into certain allusions, there is one thing I wish to render clear."

He looked for her permission to continue—she made a little sign with her hand.

"I don't want any cloud—not the slightest—to disturb our friendship; we must understand

each other completely, else there would unavoidably arise a sort of restraint between us, which, to me at least, would be very painful."

"And to me," she said.

"Then I wish to ask just where among your friends—your male friends, I mean, of course—I am to have my place?"

"First and foremost!" she answered heartily. "I respect and honour you above any man I know—and I am glad you have given me an opportunity to avow it."

"And you make me a very proud man in so doing! Now, all the rest I can say easily enough. What I want is this—if you can do it—I want you to put out of your mind the ground upon which we have stood during these past months—to count our friendships as if they had never existed."

"In so far as the regret at having caused you pain will permit, I promise," she said, though feeling a little natural surprise that he could so easily throw by the recollection.

"It is to hinder your having any regret—you ought to have none, because you have been frank and honest from first to last—that I wish you not to think. Now, I am not saying that somewhere in the future I may not again ask you to marry me?"

"Oh, Mr Caruthers! How then would anything be changed?"

"But it could never of course happen until your present feelings have entirely altered; and, forgive my presumption, I hold it not improbable that such a season may arrive. Is it wrong to say these things—does it trouble you?"

"Not as you put them—not from you," she answered rather faintly, wishing devoutly that she could tell him the whole—lay bare her confusion, her bewilderment, beg his counsel in her strait—in this struggle between her reason and her heart, when she knew that, to allow the latter to obtain the least advantage, would be madness.

"I don't know how far your frankness with your friend could go," he went on slowly, as if afraid of using any word, any turn of phrase which might possibly annoy her; "but at least you are sure you may trust me with anything which you can bring yourself to speak about."

She looked at him with her beautiful eyes full of tears.

"I think I could tell you anything in the world," she said; "you are so strong—so good—and no woman could be more gentle. Yes; I should like to speak! Until yesterday I would not have believed it possible; but I seem to

know you so much better, and yet it seems so selfish—so—"

She stopped, and put her hand before her face for an instant.

"Selfish with your friend!" he said, in gentle reproach.

"Yes, I am selfish! I ought to be thinking of you, and all the while it is this miserable Georgia Grosvenor who fills my mind. Oh, she has been the bane of my life!"

"Certainly, never such to others—I think not to you," he said. "My dear friend, you are very young yet; I know it does not seem so to you, but at twenty-two life is only just beginning! Your mistake has been that you fancied you had gone beyond the possibility of new feelings—the dreams and romance which you had seen come to other girls—and now you are confused and lost, to find all your old landmarks swept away."

"Yes, that is it!"

"It would be an empty affectation, Georgia—mayn't I call you so?"

"Of course!"

"A foolish pretence for me to appear ignorant of when and where this dream came to you,—of its object."

She stirred restlessly; her colour came and went, and he asked quickly,—

"Can you bear this? May I go so far?"

Again she signed him to continue.

"From such opportunity as I have had to judge — and you know my professional experience has made me a tolerably acute observer—I think him a man any woman might be proud to care for and to be loved by. But that is not enough, Georgia. This is a hard world; sometimes the surest proof of affection a woman can give is in disregarding it, going steadily and bravely on, as if it did not exist."

"Often! If girls would only realise this, there would be many less unhappy women in existence; many less wretched men, made so because the woman had not the courage to sacrifice herself and the man for his sake."

"I knew we should be of one mind there," he said; and the words might have appeared unpleasantly triumphant had not the tone in which they were uttered caused them to sound like a regret that it was necessary to be forced to such conclusion. "And now, Georgia, in this particular instance—"

She held up her hands appealingly.

"It is just the maddest folly in the world," she cried. "Nobody could see that more plainly than I. There, it is said, I am quite at ease

with you now! That is why I wanted to go away; it seemed wilful wickedness to stop; and yet heaven and earth appear to combine to keep me here!"

"To go too soon might be an error," he said; "better at first face a dilemma where there is possibility of action—of striving. A dream looks all the brighter when one regards it from distance and solitude."

"Oh, I don't know what is wisest or best!" sighed Georgia. "Anyway, for the present it is settled, in spite of me, that I must remain."

"But you are not afraid for yourself?"

"No; at bottom I am too selfish. I talk about sacrifice; I'm not capable of making the smallest!" she exclaimed, with remorseful energy.

"I am confident, on the contrary, that you are capable of the greatest, and that you mean to prove it."

She shook her head in impatience, not of him, but of herself, or her own estimate of that self, which, after all, she as yet knew very little about.

"Oh, I do always what laziness and pride and love of the world, and all the other cardinal sins, impel me to!" she said.

"No, no. In that case you would not have hesitated to marry a man for his wealth and position."

"Well, I trust there is some limit to my pettiness."

She tried to speak playfully, but she suddenly looked so pale and weary—now-a-days those much tried physical nerves of hers refused to bear any continued strain—that Mr Caruthers said,—

"We have talked enough for one morning. I can't have you worried either by yourself or me. Come, we have gained something; at all events, now you can feel that, in whatever way your friend may best serve you, he is ready and glad to do."

She hesitated a little, and then said,—

"My aunt—she has not heard?"

"I have nothing to tell her," he answered, "until such time as you may think fitting."

"Ah, thanks! I think I must ride back. Mrs Mayford is sure to keep Aunt Conyngham all the morning."

"She certainly will as long as she thinks you are here," he replied, with a smile, perceiving that it would be an effort for Georgia to encounter her relative. "I have to meet the directors of the coal company; when I see

Mrs Conyngham at luncheon, I will explain that I was obliged to go, and that you got tired of waiting."

He accompanied her down stairs and put her on her horse. She rode away in better spirits, greatly relieved on Mr Caruthers's account, and encouraged by the thought that now an entire confidence had been established between them, his wise, gentle counsels would aid her resolves.

He stood gazing after her, and the moment the necessity for restraint was removed, he looked tired and worn. It had been a severe blow to find that another man had intruded between Georgia and himself; but after surveying the matter from every point, regardless of the pain at his heart, his acute intellect had pointed out a course of conduct which might render his disappointment and suffering merely temporary. He was very sorry for Georgia, and apart from personal motives, his duty appeared plain—to help her against her own weakness. That she would end by marrying Denis Bourke he did not for an instant believe, and he could have conceived of no conclusion to the little romance more disastrous to both, considering the woman's character and habits and the man's position; for Mr Caruthers deemed Georgia a

person to whom wealth and luxury were essentially necessary. Her supposed love for Bourke was purely a girlish dream; and, judging from his knowledge of her, he held it as certain as any axiom in geometry that it must soon fade—die out so completely as not to leave even a shadow behind.

END OF VOL. II.

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